

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FULL-SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOL STRATEGY IN BALTIMORE CITY: A CASE STUDY

Joseph Manko, Doctor of Philosophy, 2024

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The community school strategy was first introduced in Baltimore City in 2012. Community schools are public elementary or secondary schools that provide comprehensive academic, social, and health services for students, families, and community members (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). In 2021, the state of Maryland made a substantial commitment to the expansion of community schools in landmark legislation entitled *The Blueprint for Maryland's Future*. Through the *Blueprint*, Baltimore City's community schools footprint rapidly expanded from 51 to 123 community schools during the 2019-2020 school year. In this dissertation, I present findings from a case study conducted on a newly constituted community school resulting from the *Blueprint* expansion. This study utilized the four pillars of community schools as a framework for examining programming and implementation of the community strategy, as well as its successes and challenges.

To examine implementation of the community school strategy at the case study site, I interviewed key implementers and stakeholders including school administrators, teachers, parents, community partners, and the community school coordinator. The study found that all four pillars of the community school strategy were present at the case study site and surfaced four major

successes: 1) the development of a welcoming environment; 2) buy-in from Bayfront personnel to the strategy; 3) the responsiveness of the community school strategy to feedback from students and families; and 4) robust ramp up in programs and services to provide much needed support for the community. The research findings also surfaced six challenges with community school implementation that included: 1) challenges around communication; 2) challenges posed by the Covid school closures; 3) challenges around the lack of a deep connection with parents; 4) challenges serving a Latinx population; 5) challenges associated with the lack of extended day opportunities for students; and 6) challenges that are even too large for community schools to address.

The study resulted in four major findings that include an exploration of: 1) the critical role of people in the successful implementation of the community school strategy; 2) the importance of the United Way as a lead agent; 3) the existence of a siloed community schools structure that resulted in divides between academic and community functions of the school; 4) and the presence of a transactional community schools approach resulting in a unidirectional flow of resources and support. I examined several aspects of these findings through Honig's (2006) contemporary implementation policy framework, which seeks to elevate the crucial role that people, policy, and places play in shaping how implementation unfolds.

This research study can serve as a resource for researchers, policy makers, educators, community school implementers, and educational advocates seeking to answer questions about potential challenges and opportunities as community school expansion continues across Maryland as a result of the *Blueprint*. As the community school strategy continues to expand nationwide, this study can provide insights into key implementation considerations for schools in the early stages of strategy adoption.

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SCHOOL STRATEGY IN BALTIMORE CITY: A CASE STUDY

by

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

In 2019, the number of community schools in Baltimore more than doubled due to the impending passage of the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future*, landmark state education legislation designed to provide a world-class education for students across the state. Community schools are public elementary or secondary schools that provide comprehensive academic, social, and health services for students, families, and community members (U.S. Department of Education, 2023) beyond what is traditionally provided by public schools. Many community schools are specifically targeted to improve learning opportunities for underserved students (Black and Brown students, and students living in poverty) and promote educational equity by responding to students' and families' unique talents and needs.

This rapid growth of community schools in Baltimore was the outgrowth of three years of discussion by the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education, also known as the Kirwan Commission. Chaired by former University System of Maryland Chancellor Dr. William “Brit” Kirwan, the Kirwan Commission extensively discussed the deleterious effects of concentrated poverty on a student's educational attainment in Maryland. As outlined in the Kirwan Commission report, schools grappling with concentrated poverty were initially defined as schools where 80% or more of children qualify for free and reduced-price meals¹ (Kirwan Interim Report, 2019). One of the primary remedies for addressing the educational inequities emphasized by the Commission was adopting a community school strategy for the 220 schools across the state with the concentrated poverty designation.

¹ The concentrated poverty designation, while initially set at 80% or higher of students qualifying for free and reduced price meals for school year 2019-2020, was designed to gradually expand over time until 2026, when all schools with 55% or more students qualifying for free and reduced price meals would receive concentrated poverty funding.

While the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future* did not officially pass until February 2021, initial bridge funding² enabled schools in Baltimore City and Prince George's County – the two Maryland jurisdictions with the highest levels of concentrated poverty – to rapidly expand their community schools footprint during the 2019-2020 school year. In Baltimore City, this meant that the number of community schools would grow rapidly from the 51 that had gradually developed over eight years before the Kirwan Commission recommendations were released to 123, with 72 new community schools launching during the 2019-2020 school year in response to the state mandate. This rapid expansion brought implementation challenges related to recruiting and hiring staff, creating a structure for oversight, achieving buy-in from local school communities, and familiarizing school principals and school staff with the strategy. It also necessitated the engagement of community school partners, old and new, who could respond to the urgent call to expand the strategy rapidly.

In this study, I sought to understand how the community school strategy was implemented at a time of rapid expansion. Using a case study analysis (Yin, 2013), I examined implementation at Bayfront Elementary (pseudonym), a Baltimore City community school created in 2020. Over the course of two years, I collected interview data from multiple actors involved in developing the expanded community school strategy in Baltimore City alongside those who implemented the strategy at Bayfront Elementary. I then compiled interview responses, informal observations over the course of nearly a dozen school visits, and a review of important documents to identify key themes reflecting implementation of the community school strategy at Bayfront. In this study, I utilized Honig's (2006) contemporary policy implementation framework to examine the impact of

² Bridge to Kirwan funding accelerated access to concentrated poverty dollars for local education agencies (LEAs) across the state as outlined in the Blueprint legislation prior to full passage of the bill in March 2021.

people, policy, and places on implementation of the new community school strategy. For the purposes of this study, I used the terms community schools and full-service community schools interchangeably.

Equalizing Educational Opportunities: The Community School Strategy

Community schools have grown in prominence over the past 30 years due to a confluence of factors, including increasing rates of childhood poverty, challenges for families in accessing services, the deleterious effects of childhood trauma, and an acknowledgment that schools often serve as anchor institutions for communities (Oakes et al., 2017). An acknowledgment that neighborhood and social conditions impact student academic success outside of the school building has led, in part, to the emergence of the community school strategy to proactively address out-of-classroom challenges through a catalog of services. Students living in poverty often need diverse supports that can be provided within community school environments.

Researchers, educators, and politicians have turned to the promise of community schools as a strategy to improve student outcomes and experiences, and better support families and communities. An overall premise of community schools is that reforms focused on efforts within the school building lack the transformative power to change outcomes for the most vulnerable students (Anyon, 2005; Benson et al., 2009). Educational researchers like David Berliner (2009) suggest that it is essential that out-of-school factors are considered in conjunction with any school-based strategies to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of underserved students. Some studies have shown out-of-school factors like food insecurity, housing instability, and neighborhood violence may account for up to 60% of the variance in student academic achievement (Daniel, 2017). The community school strategy intends to stymie historic racial and

class inequities by providing access to a slate of programs that may include services like primary health care, dental care, parent education, childcare, workforce development, food programming, or other activities to support students and engage parents³ and community members (Bireda, 2009). Beyond the delivery of resources and services to families, the community school strategy also seeks to harness community assets including time, talent, and leadership to improve conditions within the school building and the surrounding community.

While some studies have examined the impact of community schools on student achievement, results have not been conclusive, and research continues to emerge in this critical area. Moore and Emig (2014) analyzed 11 evaluations, seven quasi-experimental studies, and four randomized control trials and found that the provision of coordinated support services positively impacted overall grade point average and math achievement. These results are counterbalanced by longitudinal research conducted by Adams (2010) on the Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative, which demonstrated no positive effects on fifth grade math and reading scores when compared to a control group of schools. However, Adams' (2010) research study found differences in the effect of community schools when considering the quality of implementation. Adams found that in community schools where the strategy was implemented with higher levels of fidelity, students scored an average of 32 points higher in math and 19 points higher in reading when compared to the control group of schools.

Other studies have demonstrated the strategy's indirect effects. For example, Olson (2014) found a positive impact on attendance and rates of chronic absenteeism in Baltimore. Heers and colleagues (2016) found community schools to have elevated family engagement, increased

³ The term parent is used loosely to describe any caregiver who has a child associated with the school, this could include biological parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, or foster parents as long as they are the responsible party for a child enrolled at each school (Epstein, 2002).

participation in extracurricular activities, and improved cooperation amongst partners – all of which are associated with reduced levels of risky behaviors (e.g., substance abuse and criminal involvement) and elevated levels of high school graduation. In their mixed methods study of 38 parents, Arimura and Corter (2010) found that parents working with full-service community school sites reported increased interaction with school staff and significantly lower levels of stress than parents associated with non-community school programs.

The Community School Strategy in Baltimore City

Baltimore's community school strategy began in earnest during the 2012-2013 school year as a collaboration between Baltimore City Public Schools and the city's mayor via support of a city organization called the Family League of Baltimore.⁴ The community school strategy has grown significantly in cities like Baltimore, Oakland, and Cleveland where social and economic disparities are particularly acute. In 2020, for example, 46% of Baltimore City Public Schools students qualified as participants in some form of direct certification⁵ program and 64.8% attended Title I schools (Maryland State Department of Education, 2020). In the first year of the community schools strategy, the Family League selected and supported 26 community schools⁶ through a citywide request for proposals (RFP) process. By the conclusion of the 2018-2019 school year, Baltimore City had 50 community schools in operation.

The 2019-2020 school year would bring a massive expansion of the community school strategy in Baltimore City and across the state of Maryland. Within one year, Baltimore City added

⁴ The Family League was developed as a quasi-governmental entity supported through both public and private dollars, thereby requiring public funding reporting processes while maintaining some autonomy when compared to a typical government agency.

⁵ Direct certification programs include Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) and are a general proxy for childhood poverty.

⁶ In 1991, the Family League of Baltimore was established as a nonprofit agency and initiated through the mayor's office. It was funded primarily through the support of the local government, with additional funding support from private philanthropy to support after-school initiatives in Baltimore City.

72 new community schools, more than doubling its community school footprint. The “Bridge to Kirwan” legislation pushed during the 2019 legislative session (occurring in April 2019) immediately allocated funds to support this expansion. Along with funding, school systems were provided with a truncated timeline and minimal time for planning since implementation was mandated to begin in the fall of 2019. The result was a six-month sprint to notify school principals and school communities that they would become community schools the following September. During the summer of 2019, the Office of Family and Community Engagement (FCE) within Baltimore City Public Schools’ central office was charged with a multitude of tasks in preparation for expansion. Within the six-month period, FCE had to hire additional staff at the district office to administer the community school program, solicit lead agencies to support additional community schools, design a recruitment plan to hire 72 additional coordinators, and establish district rules, procedures, and standards of practice for supporting community schools.

Research Questions

This study examines implementation of the community school strategy during a time of rapid expansion. It focuses on successes and challenges associated with implementation at Bayfront Elementary School, which met the 80% concentrated poverty threshold mandated in the *Blueprint* legislation and qualified it for inclusion in the first tranche of new community schools launched in fall of 2019.⁷ This case study examined the first four years of strategy implementation at Bayfront and addressed two main research questions:

1. In what ways has Bayfront Elementary implemented the community school strategy during its first four years of implementation?

⁷ While Bayfront was identified as a community school site in fall 2019, implementation did not begin until approximately seven months later when its first community school coordinator was hired in February 2020.

2. What successes and challenges did a new community school face in the process of implementing the strategy?

Honig's (2006) Contemporary Policy Implementation Framework as the Main Theoretical Lens

Meredith Honig's 2006 contemporary policy implementation framework served as the basis for analyzing community school implementation at Bayfront Elementary School. Education policy implementation is widely accepted as fitting historically into three phases. The first centered on examining what gets implemented (1960s), the second explored what gets implemented over time (1970s), and the third focused on what works (1980s) (Odden, 1991; Lennon & Corbett, 2003; Radin 2000; Wildavsky, 1996). Honig's contemporary education policy implementation framework builds upon elements of the previous three phases, but elevates a few key differences, including 1) the development of new policy designs, often more complex and multi-faceted in nature, and 2) increased attention on the interaction between people, policy, and places that shape how implementation unfolds (Honig, 2006).

This case study of community school implementation at Bayfront Elementary School contained both constructs from Honig's research. First, it examined implementation of a new, complex, and multi-faceted policy in the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future* and its provision around community school expansion statewide. The case study examined Bayfront Elementary's implementation of the community school strategy using the four pillars of community schools, alongside examining the success and challenges associated with implementation. Second, the case study explored the people, policy, and places involved and examined how they interacted and ultimately shaped implementation. Key figures included the school principal, community school

coordinator, teachers, and parents. This case study also looked at place and how the school's neighborhood in South Baltimore impacted how the community school program was developed and actualized.

Case Study Methodology

The research that was conducted was a case study (Yin, 2014) of community school implementation at Bayfront Elementary School. Yin (2014) defines case study methodology as a tool for “investigating contemporary phenomenon in-depth and in its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly defined” (p. 16). Case study research allows for rich, in-depth research, all framed within specified boundaries (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2002). For this case study, geographic bounds included the school and its surrounding neighborhood in South Baltimore. The study focused on activities and interactions related to implementation of the community school strategy at Bayfront. Finally, the study was bound by time since the case study was conducted during the 2022-2023 school year and looked at implementation efforts at Bayfront Elementary starting during the 2019-2020 school year as a result of the mandated expansion in Baltimore.

Case study research was conducted through a combination of interviews and document review, allowing for “thick descriptions” of community school implementation at Bayfront (Merriam, 1998). Information was gathered primarily from individual actors (e.g., principals, teachers, parents, and community school coordinators) who were best positioned to provide details on implementation over time. The breadth and depth of data, drawn from different stakeholders' perspectives and triangulated through an extensive examination of associated documents, enabled a robust understanding of the main two research questions of the study.

Data was collected using a variety of formats including individual interviews with those leading the community schools work (e.g., principals, community school coordinators) and those experiencing the strategy (e.g., school parents), alongside informal observations of the case study site, document review, and field notes taken throughout. The use of multiple data sources helped aid with triangulation of data and helped to ensure agreement existed across multiple sources and various forms of data collection (Lapan et al., 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

As the primary investigator of this research, I must acknowledge my positionality. I previously served as a principal in the Baltimore City Public School System for 10 years. For eight of those years, I was a principal of a community school. This experience provided critical background on effective practices when implementing the community school strategy.

Why is this Study Important?

This study has important implications for the field of school reform and educational equity since the community school strategy is being applied in jurisdictions throughout the country and is positioned for even wider expansion in Maryland. As a part of the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future*, 72 additional schools, representing nearly half of the entire Baltimore City school district and impacting around 40,000 students and countless family and community members, will be introduced to the community school strategy. Furthermore, this study's findings have far-reaching impacts within the state of Maryland, which will support the addition of 220 community schools statewide, with ambitions to expand the community school strategy to every school in the state that has over 55% of students living in poverty. Through the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future*, the state of Maryland has made a substantial 10-year investment in the community school strategy,

making it essential to understand how the strategy is being administered and what challenges and opportunities exist in implementation.

Dissertation Outline

In the subsequent chapters, this dissertation will examine the historical origins of the community school model and introduce the four pillars of community schools as a key tenant for examining implementation. Chapter two will also explore Honig's 2006 contemporary policy implementation framework as a conceptual lens through which to examine policy implementation at Bayfront. In chapter three, I will delineate the research methods that were employed to conduct the case study. In chapter four, I will highlight important findings from the research study including how implementation at Bayfront was reflected through the four pillars of community schools, as well as the successes and challenges elevated by interview participants. In chapter five, I will discuss four major findings from the data collection process and examine them using Honig's framework. Chapter four will conclude with reflections on the significance of this study, areas for future research, and closing thoughts.

Chapter 2 – Community School Strategy Background and Theoretical Framework

Researchers, educators, and politicians have turned to the promise of community schools to address achievement disparities and expand educational opportunities (Blank et al., 2003; Galindo & Sanders, 2019) for underserved students through comprehensive academic, social, and health services for students, families, and community members (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). The community school strategy postulates that educational reforms directed solely at efforts within the school building lack the overall transformative effect required to impact student performance and change outcomes for vulnerable students (Anyon, 2005; Benson et al., 2009).

There is a growing appeal to the community school strategy in the public sphere. In 2017, Phi Delta Kappa (PDK) conducted a national poll of the public's attitudes towards public schools, which revealed high levels of support for services typically provided by community schools. For instance, 77% of Americans strongly supported after-school services for kids, 76% strongly supported access to mental health services within schools, and 66% strongly supported the provision of health services within the school building (Jacobson et al., 2018). In a 2018 PDK poll, 74% of respondents said they would approve of increased public funding for schools to provide wrap-around services focusing on mental health, nutrition, college counseling, and other needs (Starr, 2018).

The first portion of this chapter on community schools lays out the historical origins of the full-service community school strategy, tracks its evolution over the past 130 years, and examines the empirical evidence associated with the strategy's efficacy. This chapter also looks at implementation of the community school strategy in Baltimore City, highlighting its origins and recent expansion as a consequence of the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future*, and discusses key

features of the community school strategy including its four pillars. The final portion of this chapter explores the various leadership roles associated with the strategy, including the role of principals, community school coordinators, and other individuals and agencies.

Community Schools: A Re-Emerging Reform

While the idea of community schools originated around the 1890s, the strategy has re-emerged over the past 25 years, powered by limitations of the current social service system, increased childhood poverty, and the voices of researchers and advocates. In a full-service community school, various community agencies are hosted on-site, providing children and families with access to health, social services, and youth development programs (Ferrara & Gomez, 2014). Today, there are over 5,000 community schools actively supporting students and communities across the United States (Center for American Progress, 2018).

The Historical Beginning of Community Schools

The origins of community schools can be traced back to the late nineteenth century when efforts were taken to make urban schools “social centers” serving multiple social and civic needs (Oakes et al., 2017). In 1889, for example, Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Star established Hull House as a settlement house in Chicago’s 19th Ward to provide transitional support for European immigrants. Settlement houses took a multifaceted approach that included education, workforce training, and recreational activities to provide opportunities for immigrants to adapt to life in a new country (Benson et al., 2009).

Building on the Hull House approach, in 1909, the city of Rochester, New York created 18 social centers placed within school buildings, which provided services and programs in areas such

as dental care, healthcare, and workforce employment. The Rochester program also featured innovative uses of space by employing school buildings as art galleries, theaters, school-centered civic clubs, and other recreational venues. By 1913, 71 cities reported having schools that functioned in some capacity as social centers (Benson et al., 2009). A year later, in 1914, 17 states had adopted legislation enabling school buildings to be utilized not just for academic purposes but also for community-based programming (Benson et al., 2009).

By the 1930s, John Dewey emerged as one of the most influential early educators to champion the idea that public schools could serve as a central hub for a community's diverse needs (Daniel, 2007). He advocated for two essential principles related to community schools: 1) that the purpose of schooling is to educate youth for democratic citizenship; and 2) that schools and communities are inherently intertwined and interdependent. Dewey promoted community-based schools that sought to address the social inequity brought forth by the Great Depression. He believed that a community-oriented approach to schooling that involved families in the decision-making processes would make schools more responsive to the needs of the community, thus expanding ownership and involvement (Daniel, 2007).

Dewey posited that schools function best when they advance community purposes (Richardson, 2009) and centered community at the heart of the strategy. He believed that student needs were inextricably linked to the surrounding community and that schools could serve as a launching point to address community challenges and a space for communities to utilize outside of school hours (Benson et al., 2009). While the community school strategy has evolved over the past 130 years, it has been anchored in the importance of deep relationships between schools and families that co-exist as mutually beneficial partners.

The Evolution of Community Schools Nationally

In the 1980s, education scholar Joy Dryfoos (1995, 2005) coined the term “full-service community schools” to describe a neighborhood hub where schools were the centerpiece of community programming and support services.⁸ Full-service community schools involve a variety of community-based partners, working in unison to meet the needs of students, families, and communities (Min et al., 2017).

Dryfoos’ vision was actualized through the many community schools that emerged around the country during the 1980s and 1990s, which often were more robust in scope and scale than previous models. Programs like the West Philadelphia Improvement Corps (WEPIC), the Boston Connects program in, and Healthy Start in California became standard-bearers for the modern community school movement (Garrett, 2012). Perhaps the most recognized community school program was the Children's Aid Society (CAS) schools in New York. CAS began in 1992 with two community schools in Washington Heights. Based on a collaboration between the New York City Board of Education and numerous community partners, CAS grew to include over 21 schools in Manhattan and the Bronx by 2009. Each CAS school provided a family resource center, adult education program, after-school arts programming, and a student wellness center offering medical, dental, mental health, and social services (Goldschmidt et al., 2004).

CAS founded the National Center for Community Schools (NCCS) in 1994 to meet growing interest from stakeholders around the country. CAS hosted “study visits” to introduce school leaders and community members to community school principles and practices and provide a foundational understanding of the strategy and its implementation (Bireda, 2009). The CAS

⁸ The Dryfoos strategy for community schools involved support from multiple partners, deep collaboration with families and communities, and addressing various community needs including food insecurity, financial literacy, parent education, addressing mental and physical health needs for kids and families, etc.

schools became laboratory sites, enabling districts across the country to get a snapshot of a community school in action to determine if the model could be adapted in their home communities. By 2004, the CAS model had expanded to over 100 community schools throughout New York City and across the country (Goldschmidt et al., 2004).

Over time, NCSS hosted over 15,000 visitors from more than 74 countries to see New York community schools in action (National Center for Community Schools, 2021). Momentum in the community school movement led the Institute for Education Leadership to create the Coalition for Community Schools in 1998. The coalition served as a vehicle for national, state, and local advocacy for policy to support the expansion and maturation of community schools (Coalition for Community Schools, 2021).

During the early 2000s, federal funding aided the expansion of community schools through community-led learning strategies. In 2002, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program initiated a community education strategy, seeded by a substantial \$1 billion in federal funding. These grants provided much-needed financial support to expand after-school programming, community school staffing, and other programmatic funding, and increased national visibility around the strategy (Blank et al., 2003). In 2008, the United States Department of Education launched small community grants under the Full-Service Community Schools Program to support staffing, program implementation, and administrative oversight (Bireda, 2009). Congressional legislation introduced by House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) and Senator Ben Nelson (D-NE) established the Full-Service Community Schools Act of 2009, a five-year federal grant program to support the growth of community schools across the country. In 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) authorized use of Title I⁹ funding

⁹ Title I funds are formula grants directed toward high poverty schools.

for community school initiatives (Blank et al., 2010). In 2010, the Department of Education under the Obama administration provided federal funding of \$10 million to “Promise Neighborhoods,”¹⁰ inspired by Geoffrey Canada's Harlem Children's Zone in New York, an initiative constructed around a community school strategy (Bireda, 2009). The evolution of community schools in Baltimore and the state of Maryland will be discussed later in the dissertation.

Empirical Evidence on Community School Effectiveness

While there are numerous challenges to compiling empirical data on a broad, multifaceted intervention like community schools, several studies hint at positive outcomes resulting from effective implementation. In two longitudinal studies, scholars found positive outcomes for community schools across a variety of metrics, including dropout and student retention rates, academic performance, average daily attendance, and decreases in disciplinary infractions (Communities in Schools, 2010; Woods, 2019). The first study was conducted in 2010 and involved schools connected to the Communities in Schools (CIS) network, a nationwide organization focused on dropout prevention that employs the community school strategy as a school-based intervention. In the Community in Schools study, CIS schools randomly selected across their nationwide network outperformed matched non-CIS schools in two key categories: dropout rate (with an effect size of 0.36) and graduation rate (with an effect size of 0.31). The study found that targeted case management¹¹ had a significant impact compared to non-CIS schools on several behavioral outcomes (e.g., attendance, test scores, dropout rates, and student

¹⁰ The Promise Neighborhoods program is a neighborhood-level education relying on the collective action of community members, educational institutions, and nonprofits to reduce poverty through cradle-to-career social and educational interventions

¹¹ Case management in the CIS study refers to school personnel connecting with targeted students and families, understanding specific circumstances leading to higher levels absenteeism and lower academic performance, and instituting a strategic set of interventions to address the identified challenges.

retention). It also found that CIS schools with more diligent case management and robust programming yielded the most favorable results (Communities in Schools, 2010; Woods, 2019).

In 2011, AckKnowledge and Fordham University conducted a second longitudinal study on schools supported by the Children's Aid Society. This mixed-methods study included both quantitative and qualitative components, examining changes in test score performance over time and perceptions about school climate. The study found increased reading and mathematics performance for students who participated in the community schools' after-school programming. It also found improved school climate based on perception studies conducted on parents, students, and teachers, as well as significant increases in parent and caregiver involvement as compared to non-community schools (National Center for Community Schools, 2011; Martinez & Hayes, 2013; Woods, 2019).

A meta-analysis conducted by Dryfoos (2002) reviewed 49 evaluations of different community school and found academic growth, improved daily attendance, reduced suspension rates, decreases in risky behaviors, improved parent involvement, and lower rates of neighborhood crime. Ninety-three percent of community school programs demonstrated positive growth in one or more of the critical areas. Dryfoos (2002) was cautious to temper the meta-analysis results, saying that only a few of the evaluations would pass the rigorous standard required for peer-reviewed research. While this early analysis of the community school efficacy was by no means conclusive, Dryfoos argued it was a good start in building a case for the role of community schools in the educational landscape.

In their research study of five community schools in Redwood City, California, Castrechini and London (2012) examined the relationship between student outcome data (e.g., achievement and feelings of school support) and student participation in community school programs. Research

findings showed that participation in community school programs had a statistically significant association with enhancing students' feelings of school support. It also found that extended learning and family engagement opportunities (e.g., family learning nights and parent workshops) were associated with significant gains in student achievement (Casterchini & London, 2012).

Finally, a study conducted by Fehrer and Leos-Urbel (2015) in Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) examined the district's efforts to scale its full-service community school model. Using qualitative interviews conducted with parents, teachers, administrators, and school partners from five OUSD community schools, the authors found that the community school model fostered meaningful collaboration and goal alignment between schools and partner organizations. Furthermore, the research found evidence of positive outcomes in areas including student participation in services, collaboration between adults in the building, and reduced student absences and suspension (Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, 2015). While there are a handful of studies that examine aspects of the community school strategy, the rapid growth of the strategy nationwide, and in Maryland in particular, warrant additional research in order to better understand its impact.

Community Schools in Baltimore City

While a small cohort of standalone community schools existed in Baltimore as early as the mid-2000s, the city's community schools initiative was formalized during the 2012-2013 school year as a collaboration between the mayor of Baltimore City and Baltimore City Public Schools. The Family League of Baltimore – which previously focused on provided training, support, professional development, and networking opportunities for a group of after-school programs throughout the city – was tasked with managing the city's newly minted community school strategy at 26 pilot schools.

The expansion of community schools in Baltimore followed a similar process to the one used in many regions across the country. This process involved establishing a network of partners and community resources to support student achievement and community well-being, thus positioning schools as resource hubs for the community. In the early years of implementation, the Family League explicitly emphasized the importance of conducting a needs assessment, which would result in unique programming for each school based on community need and available partners. Each community school would fashion a distinct set of resources and supports ranging from food pantries to mental health partnerships, adult job training, and housing stability programs (Durham & Connolly, 2016).

During the 2012-2013 school year, Baltimore added 26 community schools – connected to 48 out-of-school-time programs (Durham & Connolly, 2016) – to the city’s existing group of 11 community schools. Community-based lead agencies¹² worked in partnership with school communities to submit applications to become community schools to the Family League of Baltimore through an RFP process. Examples of community-based lead agencies selected during the 2012-2013 RFP process include the Boys and Girls Club, YMCA of Central Maryland, Child First Authority, the United Way of Maryland, the University of Maryland School of Social Work, and Elev8 Baltimore, among others.

To acquire the community schools classification, schools had to: 1) qualify as Title I school eligible, thereby serving the neediest and most marginalized students (Olson, 2014); 2) partner with a lead agency that had received a community schools grant from the Family League through the RFP process; 3) enroll students in some form of after-school programming; and 4) work with a lead agency to identify and hire a full-time community schools coordinator.

¹² A diverse group of community-based organizations served as lead agencies. The Family League of Baltimore contracted these lead agencies to support school communities.

In the 2014-2015 school year, the number of community schools in Baltimore increased to 42 (Durham & Connolly, 2016). As Baltimore's community school strategy grew in both number and sophistication, the process of acquiring the community school designation expanded to include a planning year, which would give both school communities and non-profit lead agencies a year's notice before beginning strategy implementation. During this time, schools could introduce the strategy to the staff and community, conduct an initial needs assessment, establish plans to hire a community school coordinator, and draft an initial implementation plan. Nine schools entered this planning phase during the 2014-2015 school year, bringing the number of Family League-supported community schools to 51. By the 2015-2016 school year, community schools represented nearly one-third of the district's total schools (Baltimore City Public Schools, 2017).

In the strategy's early years, community school coordinators in Baltimore were tasked with three overarching goals: 1) to develop strategic partnerships and connections to community resources that would improve student achievement and create favorable conditions for learning; 2) to maintain a core focus on children, recognizing that children grow up in families and communities; and 3) to build an integrated strategy that improves student well-being and provides professional development for service providers (Durham & Connolly, 2016). At the school level, these goals would be aligned with three specific bodies of work that included family engagement, attendance, and school climate and culture.

In 2016, the community school strategy was further endorsed through an official policy enacted by the Baltimore City Public Schools System. The *Community Schools Strategy*, outlined in the Baltimore City Public Schools Board Policies and Regulations, affirmed the commitment of

the school system, the Mayor of Baltimore City, and the Governor of the State of Maryland in support of the strategy.

Expansion of the Community School Strategy in Baltimore City

Alongside approval of the Baltimore Community Schools Strategy, 2016 also brought the convening of the aforementioned Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education and the ultimate passage of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. The *Blueprint* legislation was designed to replace the *Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act* that was authorized in 2002 and had governed public school funding in Maryland for nearly two decades. The Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education's task was fourfold: 1) to review the adequacy of education funding across the state and make recommendations on modifications to the funding formula; 2) to review and make recommendations on expenditures of local education agencies (LEAs); 3) to recommend innovative education strategies to prepare Maryland students for the 21st century workforce and the global economy; and 4) to review recommendations for the expansion of pre-kindergarten (Kirwan Interim Report, 2019). By April 2018, the commission's 26 members were divided into four workgroups: 1) early childhood education; 2) high-quality teachers and leaders; 3) college and career readiness pathways; and 4) resources to ensure all students were successful.

There was extensive discussion from the Kirwan Commission on the deleterious effects of not just poverty, but the negative impacts of concentrated poverty (defined as 55% or more of students at a single school qualifying for free and reduced-price meals) on students' educational outcomes. Student eligibility for free and reduced-price meals (FARM) has long been recognized nationally as a proxy for poverty. FARM rates are calculated according to the National School

Lunch Program and therefore provide an apparatus for uniformly measuring childhood poverty nationwide. Currently students qualify for FARMs based on household income and family size. Children from families with annual incomes at or below 130 percent of the federally designated poverty level (or \$39,000 for a family of four) qualify for free meals. Households between 130 and 185 percent of the federal poverty level (or \$55,500 for a family of four) are eligible for reduced price meals (Maryland State Department of Education, 2024). Due to the *Maryland Cares for Kids Act* all children in the reduced price category are entitled to free meals in Maryland.

There have recently been discussions in Maryland about whether FARM is only a blunt tool for characterizing student poverty. Instead research argues that census tracts could be a more precise estimate for designated poverty. The newly developed methodology, termed the Neighborhood Indicators of Poverty, is still in development but was presented in a 2022 report authored by the Maryland Department of Education. While adoption of the neighborhood indicators of poverty would dramatically impact how concentrated poverty is measured, this new methodology has not been accepted at this point, and FARMs rates still govern which schools are eligible for the concentrated poverty designation.

Approximately 15% of schools (220 total) throughout Maryland qualify as concentrated poverty schools; the bulk of these are located in Prince George's County and Baltimore City (Kirwan Interim Report, 2019). Over months of discussion, the commission charted a pathway to provide targeted attention to these schools by implementing a new concentrated poverty grant. The concentrated poverty formula funds were the Commission's explicit acknowledgement that students living in concentrated poverty require additional resources, provided in a comprehensive and coordinated manner. Furthermore, the Kirwan Commission directly outlined the expansion of the community schools strategy throughout the state in its recommendations.

The concentrated poverty grant provided economic resources above and beyond the compensatory education formula¹³ by providing funds for a full-time community school coordinator and a health services practitioner at every concentrated poverty school in the state. These funds were directly provided to each qualifying school and did not require an additional application process. Each concentrated poverty school¹⁴ received an additional \$3,265 per year for each low-income student to provide additional social, academic, mental health, and extracurricular support during the school day and for extended-day programming. Each community school would conduct its own needs assessment process, however, Commission-recommended programs included extended-day activities, vision and dental services, behavioral health services, and family and community engagement programming (Kirwan Interim Report, 2019). This final set of recommendations represented the Commission's bold endorsement of the need for community school support throughout the state. The Commission wrote,

That many economically disadvantaged students are not receiving the critical social services, health care, behavioral/mental health, nutritional, and other needs that students from more affluent families receive as a matter of course. It also acknowledges that these students are living in neighborhoods where they experience traumas that are going untreated. While it should not be the school's, or the school finance system's, responsibility to provide these services, the Commission recognizes that students cannot learn properly if these needs continue to go unaddressed. (Kirwan Interim Report, 2019, pg. 16)

¹³ The compensatory education formula refers to the per pupil allocation that the state provides for each student.

¹⁴ In school districts with large numbers of concentrated poverty schools, districts receive concentrated poverty funding to distribute to qualifying schools. In districts with fewer concentrated poverty schools, schools receive funds directly.

The Commission also cited that while its recommendations were slated to be phased in over time, it would give priority to schools struggling most with concentrated poverty. Initial concentrated poverty dollars were phased in over multiple years. In fiscal year 2020, all schools throughout the state with 80% of students identified as living in poverty were required to complete a needs assessment and received a fixed amount of funding to support both a community school coordinator and a health care practitioner. The number of community schools would continue to expand until all schools meeting the 55% or higher poverty threshold received the resources needed to function as a community school (Kirwan Interim Report, 2019). Through the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future*, school districts were required to submit an implementation plan outlining how the community school strategy would be actualized.

Implementation plans included a process for facilitating a needs assessment throughout schools across each district, a comprehensive plan to address the needs of students and families, tools for strengthening community resources at and around school complexes, a process for hiring and onboarding an experienced and qualified community school coordinator, and the identification of community partners that could support the community schools strategy within each locale (Kirwan Interim Report, 2019). The Commission also explicitly stated its hope that elements typical of community schools, including access to nutritious food, reliable and efficient public transportation, high-quality and affordable child care, health and dental care, and meaningful job opportunities were implemented at each concentrated poverty school (Kirwan Interim Report, 2019). This explicit endorsement of the community school strategy as a tool for addressing the challenges for those living in concentrated poverty throughout Maryland is a critical component of the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future*.

As of September 2020, two school districts in Maryland (Baltimore City Public Schools and Prince George’s County Public Schools) had community school policies that were approved at the board level. These two districts represent the jurisdictions with the largest amounts of established community schools prior to the *Blueprint’s* passage, as well as the highest levels of concentrated poverty. Prior to the *Blueprint’s* passage, approximately 300 community schools existed throughout the state across 17 counties. In most of the 17 counties, community school coordinators were district employees. In Baltimore, community schools utilized a lead agency model¹⁵ and in Montgomery County’s Linkages to Learning program,¹⁶ community schools fall under the umbrella of the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (MCDHHS).

Key Features of the Community School Strategy

Community schools respond to their communities’ specific needs and assets, resulting in unique manifestations of the strategy from one school to the next (Cummings et al., 2011; Richardson, 2009; Sanders, 2016). Implementation also varies significantly in accordance with the identified needs within the school and the available partners (Garrett, 2012).

After conducting a needs assessment, the community school coordinator or other school personnel work to locate partners, funding, and resources to fill programmatic gaps (Frankovich & Lew-Brady, 2019; Galindo et al., 2017; Sanders, 2016; Mayger & Hockbein, 2019). Programmatic decisions are also informed by data gathered from families including the

¹⁵ The lead agency model relies on community-based organizations to manage community school implementation at their partner schools. Lead agents are responsible for implementing the community school strategy, hiring and managing the community school coordinator, and bringing additional resources and partnerships to the school.

¹⁶ Linkages to Learning is the name of the community school strategy being implemented in Montgomery County. This initiative is a partnership between Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) and the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (MCDHHS).

types of parental involvement activities that would assist in at-home learning or benefit the overall community.

Most community schools incorporate a range of practices and programs that can be sorted into four main categories. As illustrated in Figure 1, these four pillars are: 1) integrated student support; 2) expanded learning time and opportunities; 3) family and community engagement; and 4) collaborative leadership and practices (Oakes et al., 2017).

Figure 1.

Four Pillars of the Community School Strategy



Source: communitieschools.futureforlearning.org

Pillar One: Integrated Student Supports

Full-service community schools provide integrated student supports that address common barriers to engagement and academic success. These could include academic support programs, mental and physical health services, and early childhood education programming provided during the school day, as well as outside of the traditional school hours (e.g., after-school programming or summer programming). In well-functioning community schools, supports are integrated and

layered, meaning they complement the breadth of services provided, thus enabling compounding benefits (Blank et al., 2010).

Many community schools offer integrated services to support basic family needs, including food assistance, housing support, and English language classes. Community schools often seek parent and community feedback on what services are needed, as well as on program facilitation, planning, and recruitment. Community schools may provide activities that enhance parent and student interactions about academics, such as student-led conferencing or home assignments that require collaboration between parents and children. Community schools may also provide activities directed at parent learning, GED classes, home-buying workshops, or financial literacy courses. Many of these programmatic resources tie to the philosophy that by strengthening the home-school connection, and supporting the network of resources surrounding the student, you can best meet a child's academic and social needs. For additional examples of integrated student supports provided at community schools, see Figure 2.

Figure 2.

Examples of Integrated Student Supports



Source: mostnetwork.org

Typical support services provided in community schools include physical and mental health services such as health screenings, dental check-ups, immunizations, counseling services, and preventative care. Schools are ideally situated to coordinate and provide health services due to decreased stigmatization, accessibility to students and families based on physical proximity, and proactive identification of health challenges (Harbin et al., 2000). Frequent daily interactions between teachers and students can also aid in the identification of health challenges, with teachers sometimes recognizing and making immediate referrals to school-based health services when warranted (Whitley & Gooderham, 2016; Catron et al., 1998). Teachers and school-based health center staff may uncover serious illnesses that, if undetected, could morph into more severe

infections posing harm to the student or the classroom community. Without the support provided through a community school, student illnesses may go unaddressed until more severe symptoms or complications appear (Santiago et al., 2008). Proactive medical screenings aid in mitigating physical and mental health needs, thereby having a positive effect on student attendance, a challenging issue in many low-income schools.

Many community schools have a built-in network of care professionals, including speech pathologists, occupational therapists, school psychologists, social workers, and other professionals who can meet student needs within the school building or have the ability to coordinate referrals to external resources (Eber et al., 2002; Barlett & Freeze, 2018). Having on-site physical and mental health services has also shown the added benefit of decreasing the amount of instructional time students miss from the classroom (Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, 2016).

Over the past 25 years, emerging research on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) – a metric utilized to measure the impact of traumatic experiences on children – has elevated the need for mental health services in schools (Bethell et al., 2014). Closer relationships between parents and school staff, usually observed in community schools, may facilitate rapport and relationship building between parents and school-based mental health providers and can aid in the identification of children’s mental health needs (Basma & Kronik, 2016). Outside of the community school setting, families often need to visit multiple providers and fill out complicated forms to determine eligibility (Dryfoos, 1996). Offering mental health services in schools removes the complex and cumbersome process that may prevent students from getting needed mental health services and provides on-site behavior prevention services such as conflict resolution, peer mediation, and crisis intervention.

Community schools often forge partnerships with nonprofit or community-based organizations to provide other services like playground monitoring, mindfulness activities, academic intervention, or extracurricular activities. For example, partnerships with local universities may engage undergraduate students in student teaching and tutoring services, and relationships with local libraries may result in field trips, author presentations, librarian read-alouds, and book exchanges. The potential menu of activities is large and diverse but shares the goal of providing integrated support to students within the school setting, but in a way that goes beyond the traditional programmatic scope of what is provided in a typical school. In effect, the community schools strategy, through a network of partnerships, creates the possibility of doing more with less by leveraging low and no-cost partners and recruiting volunteers to help fill gaps in schools that are often stretched thin.

Pillar Two: Expanded Learning Time and Opportunities

The second pillar of community schools refers to extended learning time, expanded academic programming, or a lengthened school calendar. Community schools may provide students with additional learning support before or after school, or have a modified calendar that includes Saturday school or summer learning activities. Common after-school activities include homework assistance, academic tutoring, and enrichment activities (e.g., arts programming or sports) (Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, 2016). After-school programming allows students to spend more time in a structured academic setting while providing extended childcare for working families. In low-income, urban communities where many parents rely on hourly wages, the additional two to three hours of after-school activities can significantly impact a family's work continuity and earnings.

For students, the academic benefits of extended learning time are accelerated when out-of-classroom learning experiences complement learning within the school building (Blank et al., 2003). The seamless coordination between principals, teachers, after-school staff, and partnering nonprofits can ensure that after-school activities complement the school's central academic mission (Bireda, 2009).

Also categorized under pillar two of the community schools strategy are recent efforts around early childhood education. Many community schools have capitalized on the increased emphasis on early childhood education by partnering with local agencies to provide Head Start and Early Head Start services within the school building. Similar to the robust coordination needed for extended day programming, a high level of organization is required to provide seamless continuity and progression between early childhood programs and elementary education (Kauerz & Coffman, 2013; Alliance for Early Success, 2013; Adams, 2019).

Pillar Three: Family and Community Engagement

The third pillar of community schools involves the critical role that families and communities play through their participation, contributions, and advocacy. Research has shown that family and community involvement is critical to the cognitive, emotional, and physical health of both students and the community at large (Galindo et al., 2017).

A critical theory that has a bearing on understanding the family involvement component of community schools is Joyce Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence. In this theory, Epstein postulates that schools, families, and communities are all institutions that serve an important role in socializing and educating children. She theorized that these three institutions have overlapping responsibilities, and their collaboration helps maximize students' learning

potential. All three have a vested interest in the academic success of students, and therefore cooperative actions are needed to position students to excel academically (Sanders, 2009).

The theory of overlapping spheres of influence emphasizes that educational policymakers must take responsibility for developing policy, setting goals, assisting schools, and evaluating progress on school-family-community partnerships to ensure that each of the three components is providing the requisite support needed to accelerate student performance (Epstein et al., 2011). Full-service community schools are one vehicle for addressing the overlapping goals and responsibilities of schools, families, and communities (Dryfoos, 2002; Sanders et al., 2019). Research has shown that students have an increased sense of connection with their schools and a higher likelihood of participation when their parents are more involved in school activities (Thompson et al., 2006; Barlett & Freeze, 2018).

Epstein (2002) categorized family engagement into six different types of activities. This framework assists educators in developing and enhancing family partnership programming, an essential feature of successful community school strategy implementation. The six types of involvement include 1) parenting, which may include parent education courses, GED classes, training workshops for parents, home visiting programs, and family support programs to assist with health, nutrition, or other services; 2) communicating, which includes the design of effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and progress; 3) volunteering, including organizing classroom volunteer programs and coordinating work assignments for parents; 4) learning at home, which assists with home study, homework, and learning extensions facilitated at home between parents and children; 5) decision-making, or the process of involving families in school decisions through formal structures like a Parent Teacher

Association (PTA) or Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)¹⁷ or informal structures like feedback conversations with school leadership; and 6) collaborating with the community, which describes the coordination of resources and services for the community and includes health, cultural, recreation, and social support services.

Another defining feature of a robust community school strategy is providing leadership opportunities and decision-making roles for parents, and allowing them to provide input on school programming (Blank et al., 2003). Successful family-school partnerships often involve multiple stakeholders – including teachers, families, school administrators, community members, and in some cases, students – in implementation, resource acquisition, and evaluation of partnership and activity efficacy (Epstein et al., 2009; Montoya-Avila et al., 2018).

It is critical to acknowledge the challenges that can hinder parent-school relationships despite mitigation efforts. Community schools, many of which serve low-income communities, may face challenges that are compounded by differences in perspectives and expectations rooted in issues of race and class. Studies have shown that social class and cultural differences can make trust-building and communication between parents and teachers more difficult (Baker et al., 2016; Montoya-Ávila et al., 2018).

Parent-school interactions may also suffer from power struggles stemming from the hierarchical structure of schools. School officials, including teachers and administrators, by virtue of positional status and specialized knowledge, often maintain the power to define problems and identify solutions without considering parents' perspectives (Keith, 1996). In practice, many

¹⁷ The terms parent teacher association (PTA) and parent teacher organization (PTO) are often used interchangeability. In reality, an official PTA needs to be registered and requires the regular payment of dues by participating parents. Most parent groups in Baltimore City are actually PTOs since no dues are required for participation. At Bayfront, parents, teachers, and community school coordinator use the term PTA, however, the term PTO is actually a better description for the parent group at Bayfront.

minority parents may defer to the educational staff's expertise on decision-making due to a perceived lack of knowledge around data, practice, and terminology.

Another common challenge around developing strong relationships between parents and teachers is a misalignment between how each group would define successful family-school partnerships. Teachers often gauge parental involvement through metrics like regular classroom volunteerism and improvements in student behavior. At the same time, parents often frame positive teacher-parent collaboration around regular communication on home assignments and communication on academic material (Voyles, 2012). These different interpretations of successful school-parent collaborations can lead to frustrations and missed opportunities between the two constituent groups. Finally, there may be obstacles to developing deep, collaborative relationships, based on disparate views on what may account for a student's low academic achievement and who should be held responsible (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Baker, 1997). The conflict between whether it is the home environment or the school setting that is hindering a student's academic success may prove a severe obstacle in developing collaborative school-parent relationships (Voyles, 2012).

There can also be implementation challenges when attempting to elevate parent voice. In their study of social capital in community schools, Galindo and colleagues (2017) surfaced tensions that had developed between various ethnic groups, which resulted in fissures amongst the school community. The scarcity of resources, including time with the school principal, limited programmatic dollars, and time constraints on implementation, led to particular parent voices being elevated over others.

Pillar Four: Collaborative Leadership Practices

The fourth and final community school pillar centers on the need for collaboration amongst partners and leadership to ensure a seamless coordination of resources, within a thriving community school structure. Collaborative leadership practices in effective community schools involve both internal and external collaboration. Internally, the school leadership team collaborates with teachers and school staff to ensure seamless implementation. This internal collaboration involves alignment around the vision, knowledge about programming and scheduling, and cohesive messaging that is delivered to families and community partners. Collaborative leadership practices also refers to external collaborations with partnership programs, the lead agency, and families who participate in and benefit from implementation of the community school strategy. Effective collaboration with external partners requires responsiveness from the school staff, clarity around parameters and expectations, and open and honest communication to ensure the strategy is being efficiently implemented and adjusted to surmount challenges that may arise.

Much of the literature around pillar four has elevated the critical role of the school principal in building effective schools. Principal leadership has been shown to be critical for the successful implementation of school reforms, particularly when implementing novel reforms that challenge traditional school norms and practices (Fullan 2001; Smrekar & Mawhinney, 1999; Sanders, 2009). Richardson (2009) speaks to the critical role of principals in community school partnerships, citing the need for school leaders to plan and implement a vision, create and nurture relationships with people and organizations, understand and navigate formal and informal power structures, and acquire the resources needed to achieve a proposed vision (Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, 2016). The principal has the unique perspective needed to identify connections between the school's academic program and partnerships, and can gauge the resources (e.g., time, people, or

money) available to bring a concept to fruition. Stable leadership is a critical component of building and maintaining effective collaborations within a community school context (McMahon et al., 2000; Bartlett & Freeze, 2018; Sanders, 2018).

The fourth community school pillar also centers on collaborative leadership practices in community development and social capital. Oppenheim (1999) suggests that a community development strategy confers benefits by focusing on capacity building within a community instead of a simple service provision approach. In this structure, families benefit from services and become increasingly invested grow in their relationships with school personnel and the academic program. This increased investment creates a more productive and sustainable school-family relationship since it develops parent capacity rather than maintaining the dependency that characterizes the continuous receipt of services (Voyles, 2012). It has also been suggested that the nature of community schools enhances parents' development of social capital. Since community schools are highly reliant upon developing supportive relationships between parents and school personnel, these strengthened relationships can provide access to resources and leverage increased social capital for families (Oakes et al., 2017).

The Role of Community School Coordinators

The community school coordinator is a critical figure in orchestrating the collaborative leadership practices that are essential to the effective implementation of the community school strategy. They play an essential role in the success of full-service community schools (Communities in Schools, 2010) by taking on a multitude of responsibilities (Blank et al., 2010). The National Center for Community Schools (2019) identified four distinct responsibilities of community school coordinators including: 1) joint planning with school staff, in particular the

school principal; 2) aligning supports and services to strengthen the core instructional program; 3) recruiting, managing, and coordinating partnerships; and 4) connecting families and community members with resources (Lubell, 2011; Mayger & Hochbein, 2019).

Research has shown that schools that maintain a strong connection between principals and community school coordinators have the potential to create transformative educational experiences and a healthy community school structure (Sanders et al., 2019). The community school coordinator and school principal meet regularly to discuss student needs, potential partners, systems and processes to enhance academic offerings, and community-based support that will improve learning (Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, 2016; Oakes et al., 2017).

Many community school coordinators conduct joint planning with other stakeholders (e.g., teachers, partners, or community members) via a site-based planning team (Adams & Jean-Marie, 2010; Coalition for Community Schools, 2018; Lubell, 2011). These site-based leadership teams are often responsible for designing and supervising implementation of a school improvement plan that provides a framework for addressing student needs. Through the site-based planning process, community school coordinators optimize linkages between community partnerships and school needs and goals (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2008; Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, 2016; Ruffin, 2013).

Community school coordinators also work to align supports with instructional programs so that the partnerships are additive and reinforce classroom learning. They identify, manage, and coordinate partnerships to meet community needs, and build connections with local businesses, universities, nonprofit agencies, or community groups to determine fit with the school's ecosystem of programs and services.

Community school coordinators also play a vital role in connecting families to resources. They may work to build capacity with parents through a PTO or PTA structure, facilitate parent

programs, and link families in need with valuable resources. Fehrer and Leos-Urbel (2016) found that a significant portion of the community school coordinator's daily role is working with families to meet basic needs and ensuring that families feel like they are an integral part of school life.

Oftentimes, the community school coordinator functions as a referral manager, connecting families in need with critical city agencies like the Department of Social Services (DSS); Department of Housing (DOH); Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); or outside medical facilities that can provide requisite support. In some community schools, there is a designated parent room or family resource center, staffed with key personnel to ensure parents, particularly those dealing with crises, have a direct line of support and avoid being passed from individual to individual. While the community school coordinator's importance to the effectiveness of a community school is undeniably significant, there have been relatively few studies that focused exclusively on this role. Some of the key studies on community school coordinators have been summarized below.

In their research on community school coordinators, systems theory, and organization boundary spanning, Mayger and Hochbein (2019) conducted a three-year case study using time study methodology (e.g., conducting a time audit of how a community school coordinator's day was structured), interviews, and document review to examine community school coordinators' practices within three community schools. Results show that community school coordinators must work across organizational boundaries and navigate multiple relationships with diverse stakeholder groups to build coalitions around a common cause. The time study component found that two-thirds of the coordinator's time was occupied with tasks characterized as one of the four priorities outlined by the National Center for Community Schools (joint planning, aligning supports, coordinating partnerships, and documenting community needs), while the other third was

deployed for managerial and logistical tasks, thus forming a proposed fifth category. The study also found that community school coordinators experience significant tension when trying to satiate the goals of competing parties, such as the lead agency and school principal. The lead-agency model creates a leadership dynamic where community school coordinators receive directives from both parties, which sometimes conflict, thus requiring the coordinator to navigate complex authority structures.

A second study on community school coordinators conducted by Sanders and colleagues (2019) examined cross-boundary and relational leadership as a means for facilitating a thriving community school program at three full-service community schools. The study examined essential leadership attributes exhibited by community school coordinators, including their ability to manage linkages, serve as cultural brokers, and manage conflicts between key stakeholders. The study highlighted the importance of forming trusting relationships amongst diverse actors, both inside and outside the organization, and the ability to facilitate open communication, listen to diverse voices, and provide a forum for stakeholders to formulate a unified identity bound by shared goals. The research study surfaced cross-boundary leadership as a critical element of the community school coordinator position. In all three case study schools, the position necessitated coordinators building and sustaining relationships with many actors, including service providers (current and potential), families, teachers, school principals, and local community members.

A third case study by FitzGerald and Quiñones (2018) examined the community school coordinator's leadership role as a builder of professional capital. Data from one school found that the community school coordinator serves as a bridge-builder who facilitates professional capital among multiple school and community stakeholders. The researchers found that the community school coordinator functions as a school leader who forges collaboration amongst students,

teachers, school administrators, families, and community partners. By constructing trusting relationships, developing a sense of collective responsibility, and supporting decisional capital, the community school coordinator was able to advance academic and social-emotional outcomes for students in the school and build professional capital for multiple stakeholders (FitzGerald & Quiñones, 2018).

Theoretical Considerations: Education Policy Implementation

In this next section, I highlight education policy implementation's nearly 70-year research base. This examination of the three waves of policy implementation culminates in an exploration of Honig's (2006) framework on contemporary policy implementation. Several scholars believe that the examination of education policy implementation has passed through three waves since its beginnings in the 1960s (Odden, 1991; Lennon & Corbett, 2003; Radin 2000; Wildavsky, 1996). The first wave of research in the 1960s focused on what gets implemented. A second wave of studies in the 1970s focused on what gets implemented over time. Finally, a third wave of studies in the 1980s centered on a growing concern with what works (Honig, 2006).

One overarching question when exploring policy implementation is what constitutes success. Is success measured by strict adherence to the policy being implemented or is it connected to outcomes, regardless of implementation fidelity? The outlook and response to these questions has evolved over the course of the three waves of implementation. For the purposes of this study, we will use Rayou and Zanten's (2015) definition that education policies are developed by public authorities, informed by values and ideas, directed to education actors, and implemented by administrators and education professionals.

In this first portion of the section, I briefly explore the three waves associated with the evolution of implementation policy studies. Implementation research first appeared as a formal field of study in the 1960s and primarily focused on implementation of large scale, federal education policies associated with President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society programs (Odden, 1991). Early studies examined the extent to which the newly established Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) delivered supplemental services to low-income students. For the most part, policy implementation in this early wave is characterized as top down in orientation, more regulatory in nature, and focused on spreading resources to an identified population of students. During this wave of implementation, there was an assumption that policymakers would develop policies for others to implement, and that compliance monitoring was necessary to ensure policy was delivered as designed. Policy researchers nearly unanimously agreed that the Great Society programs associated with education, failed because schools and districts did not faithfully adhere to the policy design (Honig, 2006). Furthermore, researchers traced the root cause of many of these failures to conflicts between policymakers and implementers and the lack of interest in and capacity to carry out policy prescriptions (Murphy, 1971; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984).

A second wave of education policy implementation research in the 1970s focused on the introduction of longitudinal approaches that examined continuity and change over time. This second wave was also characterized by a more robust examination of variations in implementation with an explicit focus on the importance of policies, people, and places as mediators of implementation (Honig, 2006). These studies led researchers to characterize implementers as "street-level bureaucrats" working to make sense of the litany of new policy prescriptions rather as obstacles to implementation whose lack of understanding stifled policy ambitions (Weatherly & Lipsky, 1977). While this second wave acknowledged that variations amongst policy, people,

and places mattered to policy implementation, few studies during this period emphasized how they mattered (Honig, 2006).

In the 1980s, a third wave of education policy implementation materialized, closely connected to the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. Policy designs during this period centered not only on fully implementing a policy prescription, but also on measurable improvements in school performance. This era led to increased attention to curriculum, instruction, and teacher professionalism (McLaughlin, 1990). Education researchers paid more attention to states, districts, and individual schools during this time period, as opposed to the large-scale tracking of federal policies that were the primary focus of previous waves of policy implementation. During this era, McLaughlin (1991) argued to move from primarily trying to understand which policies get implemented to exploring the conditions required to enable effective practice. He wrote,

We have learned that there are few ‘slam bang’ policy effects. This is because policy effects necessarily are indirect, operating through and within the existing setting. Thus policy is transformed and adapted to conditions of the implementing unit. Consequently, local manifestations of state or federal policies will differ in fundamental respects and ‘effective implementation’ may have different meanings in different settings. (McLaughlin, 1991, p. 190)

Various Studies of Educational Policy Implementation

There is an extensive research base on the implementation of educational reforms. Century and Levy (2002, 2004) identify three stages through which school reforms progress towards sustainability: 1) establishment, 2) maturation, and 3) evolution. The establishment phase targets the introduction of the reform and consolidation around core principles. The second phase, deemed

the maturation phase, is characterized by the relative stability of reform implementation. The final stage of the model is the evolution stage, which is focused on growth and improvement connected to a developing understanding of the reform principles, thereby yielding more mature program implementation (Sanders, 2012). In the discussion section of the dissertation, I revisit Century and Levy's three stages of reform sustainability and apply this construct to my examination of community school implementation at Bayfront.

In 2004, Fullan et al. identified coalitions as an important driver of reform sustainability. Coalition development can lead to improved reform stability by building the capacity of implementers and creating a culture of learning (Sanders, 2012), ensuring deeper commitment to and longevity of the proposed reform. Coalition building is particularly important in the community schools context since strategy implementation relies on the community school coordinator as the primary implementer. With such a large amount of responsibilities delegated to one individual, coalition building is crucial to the community school coordinator's ability to impact families through programming, cultivate external partners, and build school-level teams composed of teachers, parents, and other school staff. Coalition building is a critical component of the collaborative leadership practices described in pillar four of the community school model and aids in effective delivery of services and reform sustainability.

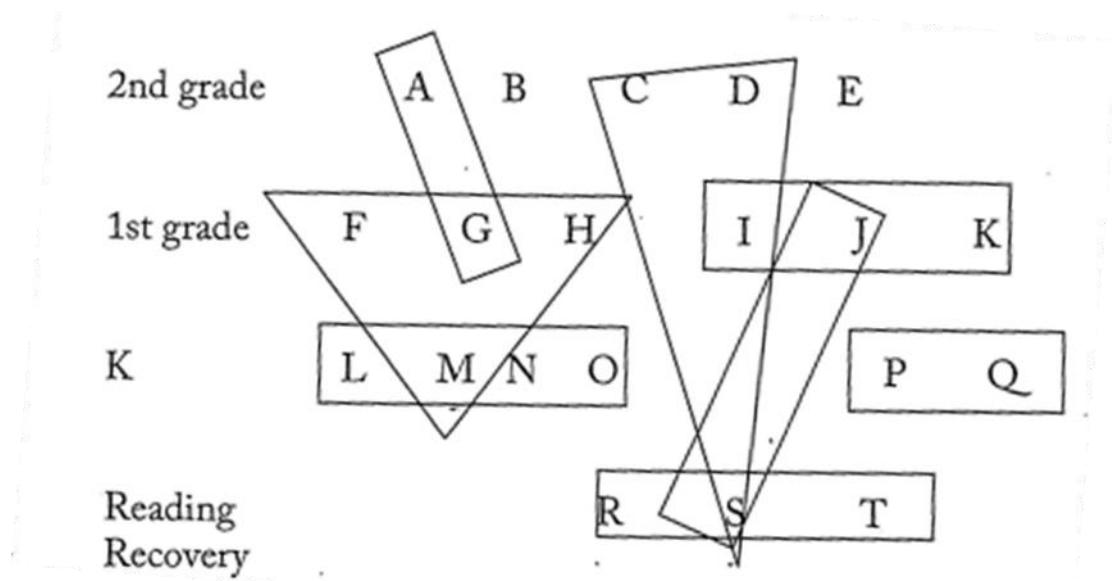
Another key characteristic of successful implementation of any new initiative is reform flexibility (Datnow, et al., 2002). In many cases, programmatic rigidity that requires strict fidelity may result in decreased ownership, as people often feel rigid reforms are foisted upon them without regard for context. In a longitudinal study of 13 schools implementing school-wide reforms, Datnow and colleagues found that reforms with greater flexibility had a higher likelihood of being sustained over time, likely because implementers had the flexibility to make modifications to fit

each classroom's unique needs. Reforms that are too flexible, however, allow for modifications to go beyond the reform's original purpose and lose core features, thereby diminishing their ability to achieve the intended goals. The community schools strategy, by its nature, is highly variable and designed to reflect each community's unique assets and needs. Programmatic rigidity risks yielding decreased levels of ownership by ground-level implementers and a lack of responsiveness to family and community needs.

In 2006, Coburn and Stein examined the social aspects of teacher learning and how organizational context and patterns of communal interaction shape how educators interpret and implement policy prescriptions. Their research echoes the notion that teacher professional relationships play a critical role in teacher learning (Little, 2003; Smylie & Hart, 1999). To illustrate how informal communities and teacher interactions shape policy interpretation, Coburn and Stein drew on studies of literacy policy implementation in California and New York City. At Stadele Elementary in California, they found that teachers formed own communities of practices with like-minded colleagues, which was critical to their ability to make meaning of new information and policy directives and implement practices. The study went on to find that these colleague interactions were utilized to jointly construct and implement practices. As depicted in Figure 3, these communities of practice developed organically amongst teachers regardless of grade level, and in many cases spanned multiple grade levels.

Figure 3.

Cross Grade Level Communities of Practice at Stadele Elementary.



Source: Honig, 2006

Coburn and Stein's (2006) examination of New York's district two found that what was intended to be a ubiquitous framework, applied across the entire region, was in reality negotiated locally, within communities, for uneven application across the district. The research revealed that it is incumbent for policymakers to not only present the expected shifts in practice, but also design a social infrastructure and learning communities to support implementation (Wenger, 1998). While Coburn and Stein's study elevated the social aspects of implementation that teachers encounter, a similar construct emerged in studying community school implementation at Bayfront, where the United Way served as lead agent and facilitated peer-support. This facilitation is explored in greater depth in the discussion section.

In a seminal piece on policy implementation, Lipsky (1980) introduced the concept of the 'street-level bureaucrats,' loosely defined as public service workers who enforce public policies and related actions, such as teachers, police officers, welfare workers, health and safety inspectors,

and other employees who control access to public programs or enforce public laws and regulations (Meyers & Vorsanger, 2007). As frontline implementers, street-level bureaucrats work to make sense of policy prescriptions and are pivotal players in translating policy. Research has shown that resource constraints can be a challenge for street-level bureaucrats, and often lead to either “inconsistent and particularistic treatment of similar clients, or routinized treatment of clients with dissimilar needs” (Meyers & Vorsanger, 2007, p. 155).

James Spillane (2004) applied a cognitive perspective to understand how local implementing agents understand policy demands and how this lens impacts practice. The way in which implementing agents interpret policy prescriptions has become increasingly important as policy makers press for ever more complex changes in local behavior. Cohen and Weiss (1993) examined implementing agents’ prior knowledge and experience and how this experience impacts the way they notice, make sense of, interpret, and react to the environment where the policy is being applied. Due to the nature of cognition, new information is always being interpreted in light of what is already understood. Thus, educators apply previous knowledge and expectations, coupled with tacitly held expectations and beliefs about what might work, when interpreting and implementing new policies. This often makes policy implementation highly variable since different agents may construct different understandings of the same reform based on what they already know and believe (Spillane et al., 2006).

School district central office administrators play a critical role in either supporting or undermining school-community partnerships. A growing body of research emphasizes the need for central office officials to serve in supportive and collaborative roles as opposed to the traditional, regulatory, or control-oriented relationships that have dominated previous attempts at policy implementation (Honig, 2006). District office involvement in school-community

partnerships is a more contemporary phenomenon, emerging in the late 1990s. Prior to this, private philanthropic organizations – not public schools systems – supported most major efforts at policy implementation connected to school-community partnerships. The increasing complexity of policy prescriptions, coupled with an evolving acknowledgement of the importance of families and communities, have led to more policies directed at school-community partnerships, a key tenet of the community school strategy. A qualitative research study of four community initiatives in Oakland explored the challenges associated with implementing school-community partnerships (Honig, 2006). The study found that central office administrators' limited cross-system knowledge hindered the implementation process, since site support decisions were informed not by what sites needed, but by what central office administrators could provide. This research emphasized the importance of policymaker connection to site-level implementers, particularly as it relates to policy prescriptions directed at school-community partnerships. It also reinforced that support should be tailored around actual project needs, rather than what resources are readily available.

The *Blueprint for Maryland's Future* is a massive, multi-pronged, complex policy that addresses several aspects of the educational experience. The concentrated poverty (COP) grant – which calls for a full-time community schools coordinator at each participating school and requires schools to provide wrap-around community support in alignment with the community school strategy – represents a large policy prescription that leaves room for interpretation. Many of the aforementioned aspects of education policy implementation – including the stages of education reform, reform stability, the importance of social networks in policy implementation, the interpretation of policies by 'street level bureaucrats,' the role of cognition in making sense of new policies, and the importance of school district administrators in supporting policy implementation – play important roles in the examination of this complex policy.

Contemporary Education Implementation Policy Research

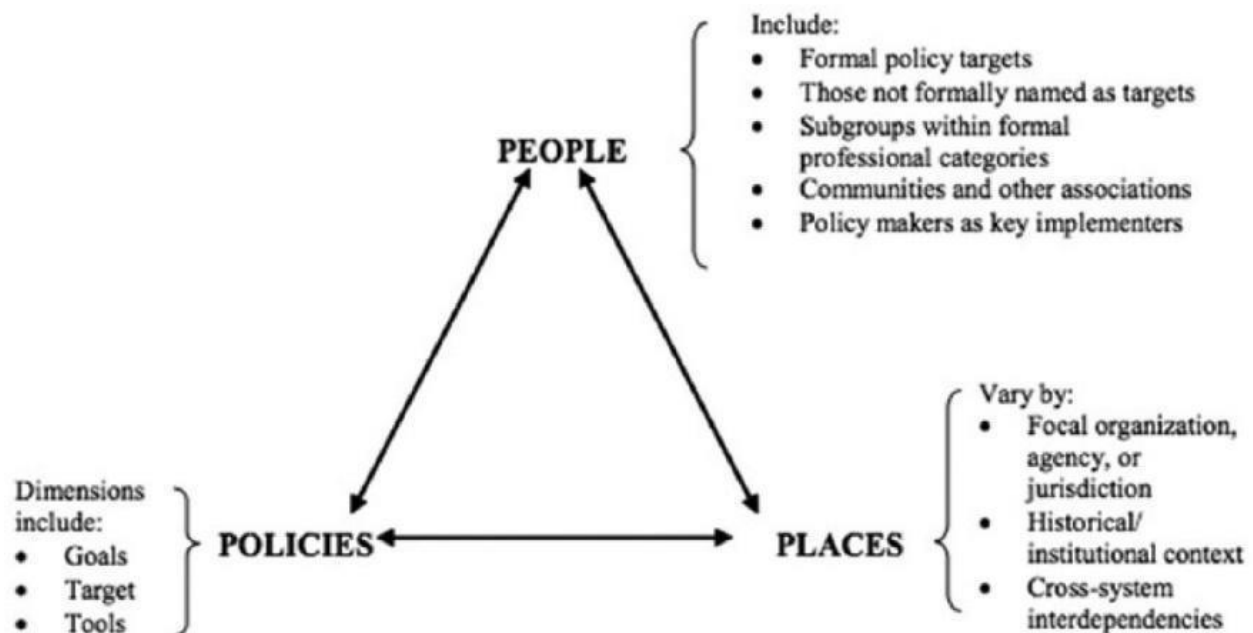
Contemporary education implementation policy research builds on prior learnings with two key differences: 1) the development of new policy designs; and 2) increased attention on how people, policy, and places interact to shape implementation (Honig, 2006). New policy designs have become increasingly complex in an effort to address systemic, deep, and large-scale educational improvement. For example, federal Title I policy implementation began as a program that encouraged schools to provide supplemental services to low-income students to assist in meeting minimum performance standards. By 2001, under the Title I provisions of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, the program evolved to include aligned content and performance standards, student performance assessments, data-driven decision making, penalties prescribed for failure to meet adequate progress, investments in supplemental education services, and school choice provisions, along with several additional layers of implementation requirements. The Title I example is particularly illustrative for this specific study of community school implementation since it echoes the layers of complexity associated with the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future*, as an omnibus package of reforms.

Modern education policy implementation research is characterized by increasingly complex policy designs, as well as a focus on the people, policy, and places that shape how implementation unfolds. Instructional interventions like improving content area instruction have moved beyond basic implementation and now seek to fundamentally change the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of ground-level implementers (Coburn, 2003; Cohen & Ball, 1990; Elmore, 1996). While past examinations of education policy implementation acknowledged that policy, people, and places impacted implementation, contemporary research seeks to explore how and

why they influence implementation. Figure 4 illustrates the various dimensions of contemporary education policy implementation as articulated by Meredith Honig (2006).

Figure 4.

Dimensions of contemporary education policy implementation in practice and research.



Source: Honig, 2006

In the above diagram, Honig analyzes how goals, targets, and tools impact policy implementation. She describes a diverse range of policy goals that could include policies around how teachers engage with the subject matter, the nature of teacher relationships with students, or policies around how the school day is structured. Comparatively, Heifetz (1994) would argue that policies that require adaptive changes (modifications in pedagogical approach) pose different implementation challenges than policies that require technical changes (modifications in course schedules or seating arrangements). Honig also noted that policies with a larger scope, such as those implemented district-wide, require a different degree of engagement than those implemented in a limited number of schools. Similarly, policies that focus on changes over a truncated period

have different implementation consequences than those policies with a longer time horizon (Hess, 2002).

Contemporary implementation studies focus heavily on people, the second component of Honig's (2006) diagram, as a key determinant of a reform's success. This research looks beyond the formal targets named in policy designs to include ancillary actors in and outside of the education system including parents, youth workers, and health and human service providers (Honig et al., 2001). There has been greater acknowledgement that a litany of individuals who, despite not being named as formal targets in policy designs, still participate and can have profound influence on the quality and scope of implementation. Contemporary policy implementation studies also no longer see groups as monolithic and loosely defined by their professional affiliations (e.g., teachers or central office administrators), but as distinct, with unique interests, beliefs, values, ideas, knowledge, and orientations that are both shaped by and help to shape program implementation (Honig, 2006). For this reason, a modern exploration of people warrants a deeper probe into the sub-groups that exist within these broader professional affiliations.

Honig (2006) also presents an evolving perspective on place and its role in understanding policy implementation. For example, examining concrete examples of how implementation unfolds at state agencies versus district central offices can illuminate each place's unique challenges and opportunities as it relates to policy implementation (Kirst & Bulkley, 2000). An exploration of place also confers a historical and institutional context that can influence implementation. For example, Orr's (1998) examination of education policy implementation in Baltimore highlighted how the historical legacy of race and class impacted the city school system's educational reform initiatives.

Overall, the modern exploration of education policy implementation is highly variable and must be interpreted within a larger context (Honig, 2006) based on a researcher's understanding of how policies, people, and places combine to shape processes and outcomes. Furthermore, contemporary researchers have come to understand how policies, people, and places combine and interact to influence implementation and that social, cultural, and institutional capital is required for successful implementation (Honig, 2006; Orr, 1998; Spillane & Thompson, 1997), as opposed to seeking universal truths. Honig (2006) describes this new approach towards policy implementation as more focused on uncovering contingencies and leaning into education's complexities, with the ultimate goal of accumulating enough cases over time to reveal predictable patterns (Majone, 1989). Furthermore, contemporary policy research views variations in implementation not as a problem to be avoided, but as an expectation of the interactions that result from complex systems, which can be harnessed to increase understanding and improve results.

These three elements of people, policy, and place combined to shape implementation processes and outcomes at Bayfront. To examine this process in depth, my research delved into the *Blueprint* and its goal of addressing concentrated poverty using the community schools strategy; the role of place as a newly formed community school located in a diverse, yet isolated section of South Baltimore; and the critical role of people, including the principal, community school coordinator, and a litany of ancillary actors.

Honig's Contemporary Implementation Framework (People, Policy, Places) and its Application to this Case Study

I chose to utilize Honig's (2006) contemporary policy implementation framework for this study of community schools due to its ability to explain complex, multivariate policy prescriptions and its deep focus on understanding how people, policy, and places inform implementation.

The research on community schools has elevated the critical role that people, in particular school principals and community school coordinators, play in enacting the community school strategy (Richardson, 2009; Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, 2016, McMahon et al., 2000; Bartlett & Freeze, 2018; Sanders, 2018). In reviewing how the four pillars of community schools manifested at Bayfront, it was apparent that people were critical to the school's ability to facilitate programming, provide comprehensive services, and develop the conditions (e.g., a welcoming environment and trusting relationships) for community members to access these services. Interviews conducted with other key actors including parents, community members, and teachers helped to provide additional perspective on how people influenced the community school implementation at Bayfront Elementary School.

An exploration of place, and the historic and institutional contexts that impacted implementation at Bayfront, revealed a collection of community partners that pre-dated implementation of the new community school strategy in 2020 and showed how race and class impacted policy implementation in the school's South Baltimore neighborhood. The study of place also involved examining the historic precedent of community schools in Baltimore City, starting with the introduction of community schools in 2012, and subsequent learnings about the strategy over the subsequent eight years of implementation.

Finally, this study of community schools examined policy implementation through Honig's lens of policy by exploring language introduced in the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future*, how the school community interpreted local implementation of the policy, the legacy of existing community schools in Baltimore, and how local stakeholders made sense of the policy prescription. In this research, I interviewed school staff and community members to explore how formal policy targets and informal actors experienced the community school strategy.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

This case study examines implementation of the community school strategy at Bayfront Elementary over four initial years. Bayfront is an elementary school in Baltimore, Maryland that began implementing the community school strategy in the 2019-2020 school year as a result of the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future*.

This study used qualitative research to observe and interpret data in a natural context (Creswell & Clark, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2011) and ‘give voice’ to individuals who may not otherwise have had an opportunity to tell their stories and share their insights (Bogdan & Knopp-Biklen, 2003). I worked to provide a platform for critical actors – including the school’s principal, teachers, community school coordinator, parents, and community partners – to share their narrative and insights into community school implementation at Bayfront Elementary.

Case Study Methodology

Yin (2014) defines case study methodology as a tool for “investigating contemporary phenomenon in-depth and in its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly defined” (p. 16). Case study methodology allowed for rich, in-depth research all framed within specified boundaries (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2002) and used multiple data sources to facilitate descriptive and interpretive validity (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). These multiple data sources included interviews, on-site visits and observation, and document analysis. By acquiring information through interviews and conducting a review of essential documents, I worked to develop ‘thick descriptions’ of the case study being researched (Merriam, 1998).

This case study's boundaries were 'fenced' by place, time, and activity (Baxter & Jack, 2008). All research was conducted at Bayfront Elementary School, which includes the school site and its surrounding community, as well as partners, the lead agency, and other outside entities. The case study examined activities directly related to implementation of the community school strategy, such as case management support from the community school coordinator, extended-day programming, integrated academic support, and family programming and support services.¹⁸ This particular case study was also bound by time, with data collection taking place in spring 2023 – the fourth year of Baltimore's community school strategy expansion. Concentrated poverty schools with a FARMS rate above 80% like Bayfront were first designated as community schools during the 2019-2020 school year as required by *Blueprint* legislation.

In addition to the various elements of case study methodology laid out by Yin (2014), Baxter and Jack (2008) provide four criteria for when a case study design is best suited: 1) the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions; 2) you cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study; 3) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or 4) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context (p. 545). This case study explored "how and why" the community school strategy was implemented at Bayfront through an examination of success and challenges.

Baltimore Background and Demographics

As a city, Baltimore experiences extensive challenges such as elevated levels of poverty, high levels of trauma, declining school enrollment, and persistent achievement gaps (Woods, 2019). In 2017, 50.4% of Baltimore City Public Schools students qualified for some form of direct

¹⁸ While items like teacher retention, teacher satisfaction, curricular decisions, and analysis of academic outcomes are all critical to a highly functioning school, these items will not be explored since they exist outside the bounds of this case study.

certification program that allowed eligible children to receive free school meals without the need for household applications (Baltimore City Public Schools, 2020). This figure is an underrepresentation¹⁹ of students qualifying for low-income status, however, as Baltimore has provided all students with free breakfast and lunch since 2015 and therefore no longer collects free and reduced-price meals (FARMS) forms.

The school district has seen significant declines in enrollment over the past several years, hemorrhaging over 3,000 students between the years 2017 to 2019 (Baltimore City Public Schools, 2020). This equates to a nearly 4% decline in student enrollment across the district over three years and a loss of approximately \$48 million in student-allocated funding from the city and state.

Baltimore City Public Schools students in the elementary school grades have struggled with academic achievement in comparison to state averages and have seen large achievement gaps between racial subgroups. In 2019, for example, only 17.1% of students received passing scores of four or five in mathematics on the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) examination, and only 17.9% received passing scores in literacy.²⁰ Performance in both subject areas showed marginal increases year over year compared to the 2018 MCAP results, where 16.9% of students scored a four or five in mathematics and 16.5% of students achieved a score that meets or exceeds expectations in literacy. However, 2019 MCAP results lagged far behind state averages, and 39.5% of Maryland students achieved a score of four or five in mathematics, and 42.9% of students scored four or five in literacy (Baltimore City Public Schools, 2020).

There have also been consistently large achievement gaps amongst racial/ethnic groups when examining test results for Baltimore City elementary school students. In mathematics, 47.4%

¹⁹ The actual FARMS rate (the national metric used to measure school-aged students in poverty) in Baltimore is believed to be above 80% (Green, 2015).

²⁰ On the MCAP assessment, a score of four represents a student who has met grade-level expectations, while a score of five represents a student who is exceeding grade-level expectations.

of white students achieved a passing score in comparison to only 13% of African American students and 18.4% of Latinx students (Maryland State Report Card, 2020). These achievement gaps were equally large in the language arts, with 44.1% of white students achieving a passing score in comparison to 14.3% of African American students and 19.3% of Latinx students. Overall dropout rates in Baltimore City schools have steadily increased, with a 13.9% high school dropout rate in 2016 compared to a 15% drop out rate in 2018 (Maryland State Report Card, 2020).

When compared to large urban school districts, elementary-aged students in Baltimore are performing well below their peers. Of the 28 school districts participating in the Trial in Urban Districts Assessment (TUDA), Baltimore ranks in the bottom three districts in terms of academic performance for elementary-aged students based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment.²¹ Nationally, 34% of fourth-grade students scored above the NAEP proficiency rate on the 2019 mathematics assessment. The percentage of Baltimore students scoring at or above NAEP proficiency was 15%, higher only than that of Cleveland and Detroit. While the average reading proficiency rate amongst large school districts in 2019 was 27%, Baltimore's reading average was 13% (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2019).

Under the auspices of the Baltimore Educational Research Consortium (BERC), in 2016, Durham and Connolly conducted a study of school- and student-level outcomes for Baltimore community schools during the 2014-2015 school year. The study looked at the characteristics of students served by the community school strategy, family engagement trends, metrics around organizational health, daily attendance rates, student mobility rates, and academic outcomes for students participating in extended-day programming. Results showed some positive trends,

²¹ The TUDA score comparison examines National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results for 28 large urban districts. The NAEP examination, a test often referred to as the nation's report card, is administered each year to a random sampling of fourth- and eighth-grade students.

including parents reporting greater connection with community resources via the school staff than parents at non-community schools (Durham & Connolly, 2016). Perhaps the most significant finding in this study of Baltimore City community schools centered on elementary and middle school attendance. At community schools in operation for five or more years, average daily attendance (ADA) rates were 1.4% higher in elementary schools and 2.3% higher in middle schools than at non-community schools. ADA rates were statistically significant in community schools, and the differences were stronger in more seasoned community schools that had been in operation for over five-years. When interviewed, community school coordinators in schools with high attendance rates cited four major factors that contributed to higher ADA: a) outreach to student families, b) trusting interpersonal relationships, c) opportunities for greater school-based engagement, and d) enrichment opportunities through community partnerships (Durham et al., 2016). The study cites several elements of Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein, 1987, 1990, 2011) as potential reasons for elevated attendance rates, including the use of community-based organizations to form strong connections between parents and schools.

Beyond reporting higher levels of community connectedness and improved daily attendance rates, the study conducted by Durham and Connolly (2016) also showed that community schools in Baltimore showed decreased student mobility or transfer rates. The mobility rate for sixth-, ninth-, and tenth-grade students in community schools was only 18.8% compared to a 22.5% for peers at non-community schools. The authors postulated that this statistically significant result is evidence that community schools effectively create school environments where students want to stay (Durham & Connolly, 2016).

Research Questions

This research study on community school implementation at Bayfront Elementary addressed two overarching research questions:

1. In what ways has Bayfront Elementary implemented the community school strategy during its first four years of implementation?
2. What successes and challenges did a new community school face in the process of implementing the strategy?

Data Collection Instruments

Multiple forms of data were used to conduct this research study including examination of historical and contemporary documents, interviews with various stakeholders, and field study notes generated from informal observation visits to the case study school. Case studies require collection of various data sources to describe a holistic, context-specific understanding of the explored phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Lapan et al., 2012).

Individual, semi-structured interviews were a critical component of the data collection process (Yin, 2014). These interviews provided the opportunity for stakeholders to share their perspectives and expertise confidentially and without outside influence.

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) identify research documents, found in both the physical space and through online formats, as a “ready-made source of data” (p. 162). I looked for any available documents or archival records available on Bayfront Elementary including information from the school district’s website, associated reports or newspaper clippings, information posted by the United Way as the corresponding lead agency or the Family League, among others. The document review process helped triangulate data from multiple sources and various methods of data

collection (Lapan et al., 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I continued to analyze documents through an iterative process as additional documentation emerged throughout the case study exploration (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The process of document review helped to further two critical goals identified by Yin (2003). It provided broad coverage of an extended time and geographic span through the exploration of stable evidence, specific names, details of events, and key players; and it helped to verify other informational sources and provided the means to identify contradictory lines of evidence.

During my multiple visits to Bayfront, I informally observed interactions between staff members and between students and parents, community school programming, and staff meetings to gain insight into how the community school strategy was being implemented at Bayfront. I captured these interactions and reflections through field notes, which I reference throughout the dissertation. Marshall and Rossman (2011) classify field notes as detailed descriptions of the context of interviews and reflections on the research and preliminary data analysis. Throughout the research process, I recorded insights, questions, and reflections, and compiled these field notes after each interview to reflect on the process and surface any outstanding questions or insights that had emerged.

The Community Schools Research Pilot

During a pilot phase of the data collection during the fall and winter of 2020, I examined public documents referencing the expansion of the community school's strategy in Maryland in order to identify 12 key decision-makers and stakeholders responsible for implementing the community schools expansion strategy. In this initial round of 12 interviews, I focused on

collecting historical data around community schools expansion in Baltimore. This pilot data also helped to narrow down the scope of the project.

For this phase of data collection, I recruited three district administrators, one official from the Family League, an oversight body responsible for reviewing the community schools strategy throughout the city, four officials from various lead agencies, two community school coordinators, and four community advocates who helped support the passage of the community school legislation statewide. Interviews during this phase were conducted throughout the fall and winter of 2020 and took place online via Zoom, due to Covid health and safety protocols. Each of the interview participants consented to being interviewed and agreed to audio recording and transcription.

In this pilot phase, I gathered information on the origins of the community school expansion, how the expansion was tied to the *Blueprint* legislation, and the implications of rapid expansion on strategy implementation. The pilot phase provided me with context about community school rollout in Baltimore City and helped me identify Bayfront Elementary as an optimal case study location. Bayfront possessed several critical elements that elevated it as an optimal case study site, most notably its status as a newly constituted community school as a result of the passage of the *Blueprint* legislation.

Bayfront Elementary: The Case Study Site

I selected Bayfront Elementary, a school serving 416 students in South Baltimore, as the site for this case study of community school implementation. I utilized several criteria to select this case study school for research. The school had to be located in Baltimore, Maryland and had to be identified as a community school during the 2019-2020 school year as a result of the

Blueprint legislation, which excluded the 51 community schools that existed prior to 2019-2020 from the pool of possible case study sites. The selection criteria also included grade configuration, with only elementary and elementary/middle schools being considered as research sites. These grade configurations pull a larger proportion of students from the surrounding neighborhood, thus providing a more direct pathway for community school programming. This criteria eliminated Baltimore City high schools, standalone middle schools, or alternative placement schools that draw from a citywide population from the pool of possible case study locations. Bayfront fit all of the criteria required of this bounded case study.. It was located in Baltimore City, was an elementary school serving a neighborhood population that could partake in the community school supports being provided, and it became a community school during the 2019-2020 school year as a result of the *Blueprint* legislation.

Bayfront Elementary serves a pre-kindergarten through fifth grade school population. The demographic composition of the student body is 40% Black, 26% Latinx, and 11% multiracial (Baltimore City Public Schools, 2023). Ten percent of Bayfront students qualify for special education services and 22% are identified as English Language Learners. According to the Title I eligibility rate, over 95% of students qualify as high-poverty students. The Bayfront staff is composed of 48 total staff members, 30 of whom are teachers. According to the Baltimore City Public Schools' data profile, the average teacher tenure at Bayfront is eight years.

In terms of academic and climate data at Bayfront, 18.8% of students scored proficient on the 2023 MCAP test in literacy compared to a 22.2% proficiency rate for third through fifth grade students in Baltimore City and a 46.2% across the state of Maryland (Maryland State Department of Education, 2023). In mathematics, 11.6% of Bayfront students scored proficient versus 12.2% of third through fifth grade students in Baltimore City and 33.3% across the state of Maryland

(Maryland State Department of Education, 2023). The average daily attendance rate during the 2021-2022 school year at Bayfront was 72% compared to a districtwide average of 82%. School suspensions at Bayfront were under 10 incidents during the last school year. According to the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA), 32% of Bayfront students qualified as demonstrating readiness at the start of the 2022-2023 school year (Baltimore City Public Schools, 2023). According to district survey data, 76% of Bayfront families were mostly or extremely satisfied with the school, 76% responded that Bayfront was preparing their students academically, and 73% of Bayfront parents responded favorably about school climate (Baltimore City Public Schools, 2023).

Data Collection at the Case Study Site

The primary portion of data collection occurred over the course of five months spanning from March through June 2023 at Bayfront Elementary School. I conducted interviews with school staff including the school principal, community school coordinator, and teachers who could provide insight into the development and implementation of the community school strategy at Bayfront. Interviews with local actors (e.g., teachers, school administrators, and the community school coordinator) provided what Yanow (2004) refers to as local knowledge, or the “very mundane, yet expert understanding of and practical reasoning about local conditions derived from lived experiences” (p. 12).

In March 2023, I reached out to the principal of Bayfront Elementary School, who had been in his role for five years and had previously served as the principal of three other schools in the school district over the course of a sixteen-year career as a school administrator. My previous experience with the school district enabled me to reach out to him as an acquaintance, introduce

my research project, and ask for his permission to use Bayfront as my case study site. He was extremely accommodating and welcomed me to use the school as my case site.

At a school staff meeting on Monday, March 13, 2023, I presented my research project to the Bayfront staff. I shared my background as a former elementary school principal in Baltimore and current status as a doctoral student at the University of Maryland College Park, as well as the goals of the study, initial research questions, and interview process I would undertake in the coming months. The principal explained that I would be present around the school over the upcoming months and that I would be working to highlight the work around the community schools strategy implementation at Bayfront. He also made it clear to staff that participation in the study would be voluntary.

The remainder of the staff meeting was utilized to review grade-level formative reading data using charts of student proficiency on the iReady and Amplify assessments over the span of three years. The principal highlighted student progress over the previous three years, but also emphasized that there were still many students who were far below proficient levels and discussed a strategic focus to help improve student learning outcomes. After reviewing the academic data, the principal then moved on to introduce the newly proposed school budget. He articulated the projected class sizes for the upcoming year and explained new positions that would be added as a result of new funding streams provided by the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future*. With this new funding, Bayfront would aim to add four new academic interventionists, two in reading and two in mathematics, to provide students with targeted, small group support. The principal also shared that there was also a projected \$500,000 in additional funding yet to be allocated and asked staff for input about how to deploy these funds. The last portion of the meeting was utilized for staff to converse, complete the survey, and provide written feedback on outstanding needs for the

\$500,000 in additional funding. During this time, I also worked with staff to set up a first round of interview meetings for the following week. This first group of interview participants included the school principal, assistant principal, and the community school and Judy Center coordinator. All three of the individuals I talked to during this session about the interview process were open and eager to participate in the study.

I sought advice from the school principal and community school coordinator to identify other key informants for the study, particularly teachers or parents who were knowledgeable about and experienced with the implementation of the community school strategy. As the study unfolded, other key actors who could provide insight into the community school program at Bayfront emerged. For example, numerous individuals mentioned the school secretary, who I also observed interacting with students, parents, and staff. The community school coordinator also suggested contacts at the United Way, which led me to reach out to the community school manager and the On Track for Success coordinator at the school.

Everyone who was approached for an interview accepted their invitation and participated in the data collection process. Each school staff member that was interviewed was involved with directing parents to community resources, implementing community school programming, or identifying potential partners and had school tenures ranging from 3-25 years. These participants also played other important leadership roles within the school, serving in formal roles like academic coach, Judy Center coordinator, or assistant principal, as well as in informal leadership roles like being the longest serving teacher on the early childhood team or living in the neighboring community and developing relationships with many of school parents.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Throughout the course of data collection, 29 total interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format. Fifteen interviews were conducted with key stakeholders at Bayfront Elementary and an additional 14 interviews were conducted as part of the community schools research pilot. This dissertation's findings section only includes the 15 interviews conducted as part of the case study phase. The semi-structured interviews began with a series of scripted questions but provided space for research flexibility in asking additional questions in response to participant answers. This interview type enabled participants to expand on topics they wanted to emphasize and raise additional issues not explicitly laid out in the interview protocol (Lapan et al., 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I developed four separate interview protocols (which are included as Appendices C-F), each with a unique set of questions for each stakeholder group.

Using the semi-structured protocol guide (see Appendices C-F), I conducted 15 case study interviews that lasted between forty-five minutes to an hour, on average. Twelve of the 15 interviews were conducted in person at the school; the remaining were conducted at a neighboring high school, a local coffee shop, and online via Zoom,²² each at the request of the interview participants. Most of the interviews conducted at the school took place in a small conference room that the school principal and secretary set aside for the interviews. The principal provided classroom coverage for the teachers so the interviews could be conducted without time pressures (e.g., having to rush the interview in order to pick up their class from lunch or resource).

²² During the case study phase of data collection, only one interview was conducted via Zoom. During the community schools research pilot that occurred during the fall and winter of 2020, all 12 interviews were conducted via Zoom due to social distancing requirements.

In late April 2023, I conducted interviews with three Bayfront teachers who were recommended by the school principal and community school coordinator as being important to implementation of the community school strategy. Each of the interviews with the teachers lasted between 45 minutes to an hour. One of the teachers who was interviewed was a pre-kindergarten teacher, another teacher was a second-grade educator, and the third teacher was not assigned a homeroom, but instead functioned as a reading coach working to support other literacy teachers instructionally and pulling small groups of students for reading intervention.

A third tranche of interviews occurred over the span of a two-week period and involved interviews with United Way of Central Maryland staff members who were affiliated with the school. These interviews took place in late April 2023. One interviewee was a United Way staff member who worked at the school twice per week as an On Track for Success program coordinator. Since 2016, On Track for Success has utilized academic measures to identify students who might be at risk of failure at Bayfront. The program monitors students who do not meet a particular threshold for grades, test scores, and attendance and provides a variety of interventions including additional academic support from the teacher, tutoring, and family case management support. The On Track for Success framework is based on Johns Hopkins researcher Bob Balfanz's research on measures predicting student success, and was deployed at a half dozen United Way-supported schools across Maryland at the time of the interview. Another interviewee served as the United Way's community school manager and managed all the United Way coordinators in Baltimore.

In mid-May 2023, I spoke with a former Bayfront staff member who was in training to become a school principal. This individual served as the Judy Center coordinator at Bayfront for five years and helped establish its community school vision. She also led the process for selecting

the initial community school coordinator at Bayfront in collaboration with the school principal. This interview provided some historical context on the establishment of the community school initiative at Bayfront.

A final tranche of interviews in early June 2023 focused on three Bayfront parents. Since these parents were not consistently at the school, the community school coordinator helped to schedule their interviews. Each of the parent interviews lasted between 30 to 45 minutes and varied substantially based on each parent's familiarity with the community school model. For this reason, the parent questions focused on family programming and extended-day activities, and extra elements for parents and kids that existed at Bayfront as opposed to asking explicitly about the community school program since they were not familiar with the community school terminology.

Ethical Considerations

Maintaining adherence to a firm code of ethics is one of the most critical aspects of the research process. Since ethical issues emerged throughout the entirety of the research timeline, it was imperative that I consistently reflect on established processes to ensure integrity in data interpretation, preserve confidentiality of the participants, and reflect on any assumptions (Creswell, 2014).

Throughout the research process, it was essential to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants. I made participant responses confidential by assigning pseudonyms to each interviewee and removed all identifying information that was not essential for the study's overall understanding. I also assigned a pseudonym to the case study site to further preserve confidentiality. I was the only individual who had access to the entire data set, however,

I made portions of the data set available to my doctoral advisor, who helped guide the data analysis process.

Collected data was saved on one of two password-protected computers, a home computer at my residence and a personal laptop used for mobile research. Any printed documents were kept in a locked file cabinet in my home office. Files generated from audio recordings were moved from the recording device to either my password-protected home computer or my mobile laptop within 24 hours. All audio recordings were kept confidential and I was the sole individual to hear the audio recordings in their entirety. While none of the interview participants opted out of audio recording, the option to not be recorded was provided to all participants.

As securing informed consent is an essential ethical consideration for qualitative research, I obtained consent from recruited individuals before conducting each interview. The consent form included consent to participate in the study, be interviewed, have their data be made anonymous and included in the study, and have their interview responses audio-recorded and transcribed. I requested a signature and date for each consent form before collecting any data. Each participant was reminded that they could opt out of any questions or conclude the interview at any point. All participants were also informed that they could ask about the study findings, confidentiality, or any other research procedures associated with the study at any point throughout the process.

While this research study only involved adult participants, there were some limited risks associated with participation. Individuals were informed that they might feel anxiety about their responses, particularly if the program had not developed as intended. If individuals felt like their work within the community school had not been effective, or if there were hurdles or problems with program implementation, participants could feel some risk in sharing their experiences. I was also aware that there may have been some concerns about voicing criticism about their principal,

lead agency officials, district administrators, or other individuals associated with the research project. Participants were assured that they were not required to respond to any questions that caused them discomfort, and that they had the authority to conclude the interview at any time.

Data Analysis

All the collected data, including documents, interviews, and field notes, were collectively analyzed to develop a holistic understanding of the case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The various data points were organized in a systematic and comprehensive case record for efficient data analysis. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) describe data analysis as “the process for making sense out of the data” (p. 202).

A third party transcription service transcribed all interview audio recordings. Each transcription was then loaded in Nvivo 12 to conduct the qualitative analysis. Nvivo is a qualitative data analysis software, which enables the user to assign text from documents like meeting minutes, strategic plans, reports, and transcripts to a series of corresponding codes (Patton, 2015). I began the coding process with a series of deductive codes based on themes from the literature review and the theoretical framework (Patton, 2002) presented in Chapter 2. A table with deductive primary and secondary codes is included below as Figure 6. The primary codes include major theoretical and practical aspects related to community school and program implementation. The literature around community schools prominently highlights the four pillars of community schools as buckets into which you can classify typical programming. For this reason, I utilized the elements of community schools as a first level of code and applied a second level of code around each of the four pillars: 1) integrated student support, 2) extended learning time, 3) parent and community involvement, and 4) collaborative leadership practices. I used Honig’s

(2006) study of program implementation as another branch of codes centered on people, policy, and places.

There were also three deductive code areas that directly addressed my research questions or other areas of interest that I felt were important to unpack from the process of data collection. These areas included the perceived efficacy of the community school implementation with a focus on successes and challenges, the levels of deliberate planning or organic development associated with different elements of the strategy, and the role of intermediaries in the process of community school implementation. Intermediaries like the school system, professional development providers, and third-party lead agents play a critical role in implementation of the community school strategy, but mentions of these third-party actors are largely absent in the community school research. I added this layer of coding since I was interested in unpacking the roles of intermediary organizations (e.g., the United Way as the lead agent, the Family League of Baltimore as the professional development provider, and the Baltimore City Public Schools System as the funder of the initiative). The first- and second-level codes utilized in the deductive coding process are listed below:

Figure 5.

First and Second Level Codes (Deductive)

First-Level Code	Second-Level Code
Elements of the Community School Program	Pillar One – Integrated Student Supports
	Pillar Two – Extended Learning Time
	Pillar Three – Parent And Community Engagement
	Pillar Four – Collaborative Leadership Practices

First-Level Code	Second-Level Code
Elements of Implementation	People
	Policy
	Places

First-Level Code	Second-Level Code
Effectiveness of Implementation	Aspirational Goal in the Community School Rollout
	Tangible Successes in the Community School Rollout
	Challenges in the Community School Rollout

First-Level Code	Second-Level Code
Deliberativeness	Backed by Planning and Vision
	Happening Organically

First-Level Code	Second-Level Code
Oversight of Program	Role of the United Way
	Role of the District
	Role of the Family League

The interview transcription process took place between June and July of 2023. During this process, I re-read each of the transcripts and began coding blocks of text into one of the 15 second-level codes based on content. In some cases, I assigned text blocks to multiple second-level codes. For instance, I coded the statement, “So every Monday, we meet [the community school coordinator and principal], we discuss goals of the school and then goals of the community school program. So we know that activities like literacy night, math night have to happen” under elements of implementation as “people,” elements of the community school program as both “pillar three: parent and community engagement” and “pillar four: collaborative leadership practices,” and deliberativeness as “backed by planning and vision.” For this particular text block, the reference to the community school coordinator and principal identified the importance of people, whereas “literacy and math night” referenced events for parent and community members. The collaborative conversation between the school principal and community school coordinator signified a collaborative leadership practice. Finally, the reference to discussing “goals of the school and then goals of the community school program” signifies a more strategic layer of planning as opposed to something that emerged organically. In some instances, I assigned multiple second-layer codes corresponding to the same first-layer code to the same block of text. This happened most frequently when referencing elements of the community school program that had evidence of one of the first three pillars (integrated student supports, extended learning time, or parent community and engagement) coupled with the mention of cross-school planning that would correspond to “pillar four: collaborative leadership practices,” as was the case in the previous example.

The inductive coding process involved a thorough review of all of interview transcripts, memos, and documents from the case study to identify emergent themes within the data set. After coding the texts from each of the 15 transcribed interviews into Nvivo using the designated first-

and second-layer codes, I began the process of compiling a third layer of inductive codes using compilation sheets. It is typical for data coding, particularly in the inductive phase, to be highly iterative (Creswell, 2007; Neale, 2016). For the third layer of coding, I opted to group the inductive codes manually placing the Nvivo-generated compilation sheets into a word processing program and rearranging the quoted passages into groups based around similar themes. For example, I used the compilation sheet for “challenges with community school implementation” to group interview quotes into multiple themes, including implementation challenges such as: 1) challenges around communication, 2) challenges posed by the Covid school closures, 3) challenges around the lack of a deep connection with parents, 4) challenges serving a Latinx population, 5) challenges associated with the lack of extended day opportunities for students, and 6) challenges that are even too large for community schools to address. These themes were referenced multiple times by multiple respondents across the 15 interviews.

By grouping these statements into recurring themes, I also aimed to aid with triangulation since I only included items at the third level if they were mentioned on multiple occasions by multiple interview respondents. These themes formed the basis for the findings section of the dissertation. For each passage in the findings section, I sought to identify a few key quotes that best represented each theme.

Internal Validity – Credibility, Reliability, and Bias

When conducting any research, it is essential to account for bias throughout the various states of evidence collection (Bennett, 2010; George & Bennett, 2005). I employed several structures to minimize bias and meet design tests for validity and reliability including: 1) using multiple sources of evidence, 2) creating a case study database, and 3) developing and maintaining

a chain of evidence (Yin, 2013). By conducting interviews with multiple stakeholders, I sought to gather insights and perspectives from a variety of actors who interacted with the community school strategy and triangulate the interviews to ensure data accuracy. I developed an extensive case study database per Yin's (2003) second principle for strengthening research reliability. This database included transcriptions for each of the 15 interviews, field notes related to the interviews, interview analyses linked to the corresponding inductive and deductive codes, and a final case study report. The third principle for improving research reliability involves detailing a transparent and systematic chain of evidence leading from beginning to end (Yin 2003). This case study's evidence chain is designed to enable external actors to follow the research that led to the original research questions, to the data collection and data analysis processes, and finally to the development of research findings (Yin, 2003). This detailed record enables duplication of the research study should future researchers seek to expand on the research or confirm results.

In document analysis, I worked to avoid bias by being discerning about the primary and secondary sources and using external data points to triangulate any assertions. I sought to mitigate bias presented in primary documents by utilizing critical “who, for whom, where, when, and why” questions to unearth any potential author bias (Kay & Baker, 2015).

I sought to account for varying forms of bias throughout the process of collecting interview data. During the planning phase, I implemented safeguards to increase the interview protocol's validity and reliability such as allowing colleagues familiar with the research study to review and provide feedback on the interview structure, questions, and wording. Even with this well-vetted interview protocol and a robust set of interview participants, I kept in mind that interviewees may inaccurately represent their position, opting instead to respond favorably or report what I, as the

researcher, wanted to hear (Tansey, 2007) and worked to mitigate the potential for inauthentic responses that may pose a threat to the research study's validity (Barlett & Freeze, 2018).

It was also imperative to determine underlying motivations behind each interview participants' responses and mitigate potential biases during evidence evaluation (George & Bennett, 2005). Once again, the process of cross-checking and triangulation helped to maintain internal validity on the interview process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I also worked to avoid placing too much authority on isolated voices (George & Bennett, 2005) by drawing from and valuing multiple voices.

Shenton (2004) lays out four strategies to improve credibility in the data analysis process: 1) utilizing well-established research methods, 2) employing triangulation, 3) member checking participant responses, and 4) using ethical practices to ensure accurate participant communication. I used all four of these methods to minimize bias and ensure the credibility of the data being analyzed and presented. By finding agreement amidst multiple data sources and using a variety of data collection methods, I worked to improve the internal validity of the data being collected (Lapan et al., 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

External Validity – Transferability and Dependability

In qualitative research, external validity refers to the ability to apply conclusions from a scientific study to other contexts (Mitchell & Jolley, 2001). Transferability refers to the extent that the findings from one study can be applied to other situations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Since the community school strategy is being applied broadly in jurisdictions throughout the country, there is presumed interest in using the findings from this study to improve processes around the structure and implementation of the community schools strategy in a local context. Since this

qualitative study's conditions are unique, it was important to create a case record, including detailed and thorough descriptions of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) so that future researchers are equipped with enough information to transfer learnings from this research study to other contexts.

Dependability is another important concept when examining a study's external validity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe dependability as the extent to which research findings are replicable, given the same methods, participants, and context. Achieving dependability is challenging for qualitative researchers since most of the data is acquired through human perspectives, including interview responses, document analysis, and researcher interpretation. Human perspectives are often highly variable based on time, place, association with other human actors, and other contextual factors, thereby creating conditions that can fluctuate significantly from study to study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Because of this high degree of variability, I attempted to achieve dependability by thoroughly detailing my methodology and data collection and analysis processes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Shenton, 2004).

Researcher Positionality

By providing acknowledgment beforehand, those reading and evaluating the study results' veracity are better equipped to understand how the researcher's background experiences may unduly influence how the findings are interpreted (Lapan et al., 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). For this study, it is important for me to disclose my personal and professional experiences related to community schools in Baltimore, which may potentially affect the research findings. Throughout the process of data collection and analysis, researchers must account for personal biases that may distort how meaning is developed (Seidman, 2013). This is often

particularly challenging for individuals whose lived experiences may provide them with unique insights and assumptions that may influence the analysis.

My research positionality was informed by my background as a former principal of a community school in the Baltimore City Public Schools System. I previously served as a principal for 10 years within the Baltimore City Public School System, the school district being studied. I was the principal of a small elementary school of nearly 500 students, nearly 100% of whom were African American, and over 90% of whom qualified for the federal free and reduced meals program. It is important to note that the school was located in Northwest Baltimore, so while it was in the same school district, my experience was in an entirely different region of the city than Bayfront. As school principal, I worked with ChildFirst Authority, a local community-based organization, to apply for the Family League's initial request for proposals (RFP) for community schools during the 2012-2013 school year. My school was one of the 26 original schools selected to officially launch the Baltimore community schools model. For eight years thereafter, I continued to lead this community school with ChildFirst Authority as the lead agency (whereas Bayfront has worked with the United Way of Maryland as its lead agency). My final year as a school principal was the 2019-2020 school year and my involvement with the community school expansion in Baltimore during the 2018-2019 school year was minimal, only attending one mandatory meeting for both current and future Baltimore community schools that presented information about the expansion strategy.

My current role as a program officer for the Abell Foundation has also provided opportunities to interact with individuals from the United Way, a key partner in the community schools initiative at Bayfront. While the United Way has not been a direct grant recipient of the Abell Foundation during my tenure as the education program officer, I periodically interact with

United Way staff members through local network events facilitated by the Maryland Philanthropy Network, Baltimore's Promise, or other convening entities in Baltimore.

In October 2021, I was selected as one of seven members appointed to the statewide Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB). The AIB is the oversight entity responsible for monitoring implementation of the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future*. The AIB meets monthly via televised, public meetings to discuss policy relevant to successful implementation of the *Blueprint* legislation.

While my in-depth knowledge of the implementation of the community schools strategy in Baltimore since its inception may inevitably lead to areas of potential bias, I have worked to ensure accurate interpretation of the data through multiple techniques for supporting internal validity. Additionally, my experiences leading a community school for nearly a decade has afforded me increased access to principals, community school coordinators, teachers, and school teams that may not have been granted to an outsider. Additionally, my current role as a board member for the AIB has provided valuable insights into the current rollout of the community school strategy across the state of Maryland. I believe that my depth of knowledge and experience in leading a community school and overseeing *Blueprint* policy implementation helped me construct an informed data collection and data analysis process.

Chapter 4 – Research Findings

The findings section examines qualitative data from interviews with staff, parents, and community members at Bayfront Elementary, as well as insights provided by a review of important documents and observations from multiple visits to the case study school. The findings section is structured around responses to the study's two research questions:

1. In what ways has Bayfront Elementary implemented the community schools strategy during its first four years of implementation?
2. What successes and challenges did a new community school face in the process of implementing the strategy?

Research Question One: Implementation of the Community Schools Strategy at Bayfront Elementary

The first portion of the findings section examines the experiences of participants with implementation of the community schools strategy at Bayfront Elementary during its first four years of adoption. I used the four pillars of community schools (Oakes et al., 2017; Blank et al., 2003) as an organizational structure for my analysis. As I described in Chapter 2, the four pillars outline the core areas of emphasis for strategy implementation. Each of the four pillars incorporates a series of typical programs and activities common in community school implementation.

The Four Pillars of Community Schools at Bayfront

The four pillars are a common framework used in community schools literature to categorize essential elements for successful programming. The four pillars include: 1) integrated

student support, 2) extended learning time, 3) family and community involvement, and 4) collaborative leadership practices (Oakes et al., 2017; Blank et al., 2003). While each of these four pillars stands alone as a discrete category, in reality there is much overlap as many programs fit into multiple categories. As I described in the methodology section, I coded participants' responses into any and all of the corresponding four pillars, meaning a specific comment could be associated with more than one pillar. For example, I coded descriptions of a Family Literacy Night as an integrated student support (pillar one) – as it represented the academic nature of improving student reading – and as family and community involvement (pillar two), showing how family support was integral for a successful Literacy Night program. While I coded responses under all applicable pillars, I used interview quotes to illustrate the best corresponding pillar.

As evidenced by interviews with stakeholders, school observations, and document review, during the first few years of becoming a community school, Bayfront Elementary implemented programs and activities associated with all four pillars. However, certain pillars were referenced far more frequently than others, indicating that some elements of the community school strategy were more prominent or emphasized more than others during the first four years of implementation. Overall, the most frequently referenced was pillar three, centered on family and community engagement. Pillar four, focused on collaborative leadership practices, was the second most frequently cited. Pillar one, describing the integrated student supports provided at Bayfront, was mentioned the third most frequently. Finally, pillar two, focused on opportunities for extended school time, was the least frequently referenced of the four pillars.

Pillar One – Integrated Student Supports

As I discussed in Chapter 2, pillar one is associated with integrated student supports. These supports cover a broad range of program and activities that are designed to address common barriers to school engagement and academic success. Programming may include academic activities like tutoring and intervention services, clinician-provided physical and mental health support, and social emotional programming like peer mediation or mindfulness services. Research has shown that well-functioning community schools offer supports that are both integrated and layered, meaning they complement the scope of services already being provided by the school and therefore have the power to yield compounding benefits (Blank et al., 2010). Study participants shared a variety of programs that Bayfront implemented as part of pillar one including: 1) academic support and tutoring, 2) health and wellness programming, and 3) family nights and social events.

Academic Support and Tutoring.

Over the first four years of community school programming at Bayfront, there was a gradual increase of integrated student support services targeted towards academic support. The school principal and community school coordinator worked to form and maintain partnerships with two prominent non-profit organizations that specialize in the delivery of tutoring services. The Literacy Lab and Springboard Collaborative are national tutoring providers with local chapters in Baltimore. While the partnership between Bayfront and Literacy Lab pre-dated Covid and the initiation of the community school strategy, the Springboard collaboration began in fall 2022 with support from Federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars that were allocated to address pandemic learning loss. Bayfront supplemented these partnerships with an in-house reading intervention program in which two Bayfront teachers worked with a caseload of students in small

groups throughout the day. With so many students at Bayfront with reading levels below or far below proficient, the Bayfront principal worked with teachers to connect students struggling with literacy to either the tutoring or intervention services offered at the school. There was also an effort to ensure that students were not connected to multiple programs, thereby maximizing the number of children who received literacy support either through the tutoring providers or the intervention teachers.

Many interview participants described academic support, including tutoring programs, as essential components of the community school strategy. Many participants referenced the Literacy Lab, which utilizes AmeriCorps volunteers who undergo intensive training to provide one-on-one and small group support to all Pre-K students and specific K-3 students. In the Literacy Lab intervention, students were pulled from their classrooms and brought to a centralized space within the school for tutoring and literacy activities. Typically, students were pulled for tutoring during a daily designated personalized learning block that is integrated into the school schedule. Bayfront teachers commented on the improvements in reading performance they saw for students who were regularly pulled for this targeted literacy support. The Literacy Lab typically worked with 30-45 Bayfront students in kindergarten through third grade annually.

While the Literacy Lab tutoring program occurred during the school day and was delivered by trained AmeriCorps volunteers, Springboard tutoring took place after school and was provided by Bayfront teachers who received a stipend for their services. Around 50 Bayfront students were enrolled in Springboard after-school tutoring sessions, offered three days a week for two hours each day to students in kindergarten through third grade who needed help in literacy. Springboard instructors worked with groups of 15 students, matched with like abilities and utilized a structured

phonics curriculum aligned with principles of the science of reading. A Bayfront teacher complimented the learning growth she saw in students who participated in Springboard by saying,

Some of the kids in my class that I was working in, they went to the after-school tutoring [offered through the Springboard Collaborative], and the things that they didn't know in the beginning of the year or they just weren't grasping, as they continued to go to the after school program, they just caught onto it.

Outside of the two non-profit tutoring providers, the school principal also hired two new reading interventionists to provide literacy support to Bayfront students. The reading interventionists were teacher-level positions at Bayfront, but rather than being assigned homeroom responsibilities, they were tasked with providing targeted support in phonics and reading comprehension to caseloads of students who were far behind in reading. A Bayfront teacher described the benefits of this new position by saying, “We have a literacy interventionist for our upper grades. We have one for the lower grades who is also our Gifted and Advanced Learning (GAL) support. So I think bringing those extra supports in for students has definitely helped [with addressing weaknesses in reading performance].” The school principal utilized portions of the school’s per pupil allocation to hire teacher-level school staff deployed specifically to work with struggling learners. The school principal also allocated funds in the 2023-2024 school budget for another subject interventionist to support students struggling with mathematics.

Health and Wellness Programming.

Multiple stakeholders also identified a variety of health and wellness programs established at the school during the first four years of implementation of the community school strategy at Bayfront, albeit less frequently than they mentioned academic supports. Bayfront implemented a mobile dentist program, which enabled any Bayfront student who qualified for Medicaid and had

a signed permission slip from a parent or guardian to receive free dental care at the school. This service was particularly important within the South Baltimore community since a lack of nearby medical facilities and robust transportation access made receiving regular dental care challenging. The mobile dentist visited the school twice each year, typically for two to three days at a time. Staffed by a dentist and dental hygienist, the mobile dentist could provide services ranging from teeth cleanings and fillings to comprehensive root canals. The community school coordinator at Bayfront played a critical role in scheduling mobile dentist visits and student appointments, notifying parents about the service, collecting permission slips, and verifying Medicaid eligibility.

All Bayfront students were also eligible for vision services through the Vision for Baltimore program. This program provided free vision screenings for all students and provided two sets of prescription eyeglasses to each child who qualified under the screening process. Eligible Baltimore City students received donated glasses through a partnership with Warby Parker. The community school coordinator played an integral role in scheduling the Vision for Baltimore van to visit the school once each year, collecting permission slips for students whose parents gave approval for the vision screening, scheduling vision testing for each student, and distributing eyewear to each child who qualified for glasses.

While health programs were common offerings at many Baltimore City schools, these programs were best facilitated at schools utilizing a community school model, where a community school coordinator could coordinate services. As previously mentioned, the community school coordinator played an important role in scheduling visits, disseminating information to parents and collecting the necessary forms, following up with guardians about missing documentation, and communicating with teachers to ensure students were ready during their appointment times. One Bayfront teacher mentioned these programs aimed at addressing health challenges by stating,

So just all kinds of outside programs, for instance, vision comes in, dental comes in. I'm trying to think who else comes in.... hearing comes in. We had a mobile glasses program that gave kids free glasses for two years. And then they come back and get rechecked and can get new glasses as well again.

Family Nights and Social Events.

As part of the community school strategy, Bayfront offered a variety of academic and social events to parents and students. Many school stakeholders who were interviewed commented on the various academic and social events implemented in connection with the community school strategy. While these events were frequently tied to opportunities for parent involvement, they also doubled as a vehicle for providing student supports. Events included Literacy Nights, March Madness Math Nights, Black History Month celebrations, and a school-wide field trip.²³

One Bayfront teacher acknowledged both the success of these academic learning nights by saying, “[The learning nights were] always well attended, we’ll have math night a couple of weeks out, it will be well attended. I think these are great things we’ve provided for parents to actively spend time with your kid here at school.” While these types of learning nights also took place within schools that were not designated as community schools, without dedicated personnel like a community school coordinator, the frequency, rigor, and efficacy was often much lower.

Pillar Two – Extended School Time

The second pillar of community schools corresponds to extended school time programming such as 1) early learning experiences, 2) after-school activities, and 3) summer

²³ Special events that fall under the description of integrated student supports are often held after school and are a way to involve students and parents in learning activities. Typically, a math or literacy night involves families coming to the school, convening in a communal space (e.g., the cafeteria, auditorium, or library) and participating in a series of activities or workshop sessions around a targeted topic.

programming. Extended school time programming in a structured setting serves the dual purpose of reinforcing academic learning while also providing extended childcare for working families. The childcare advantages of extended school time are particularly essential in low-income communities where many parents rely on hourly wages, do not have schedule flexibility, and benefit from the continuity of work hours and earnings. Research has shown that the instructional benefits of extended learning opportunities are amplified when out-of-classroom learning complements the learning that occurs daily within the school building (Blank et al., 2003). At Bayfront, a variety of extended school time programs that were identified through researcher observation, document review, or were referenced during the interview process.

Extended Early Learning: The Judy Center.

One area of extended school time activities fell within the domain of early learning opportunities and included a variety of activities implemented through the Bayfront Judy Center. The Judy Center program began in Maryland in the 1990s and was envisioned as early learning hubs designed to connect families with high-quality, comprehensive, full-day, full-year early education services. The centers were named in honor of Judith P. Hoyer – an early education coordinator for Prince George’s County Public Schools – after her passing in 1997. In 2021, there were 60 Judy Centers across Maryland serving a total of 13,827 children. Functionally, the term “center” is misleading, since Judy Centers are not designated spaces, but rather two staff people at each school – a Judy Center coordinator and a family services coordinator – responsible for developing workshops, identifying early learning partners, conducting outreach to families and local childcare entities, and providing case management to early learning families within their designated communities. Historically, the Office of Early Learning at MSDE provided each Judy Center with an annual budget of around \$330,000 to support staffing and programming costs. With

the passage of the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future* in 2021, however, Judy Center funding is provided to each district through *Blueprint* funding. MSDE determines Judy Center locations in coordination with local school districts to ensure a broad dispersion across the state.

At Bayfront, the Judy Center provides programs and activities to families and children starting from birth to facilitate a seamless on-ramp into pre-kindergarten and kindergarten at ages four and five, respectively. Programs and activities include early childhood playgroups and Head Start programming starting at age three. The Judy Center team partnered with Catholic Charities to provide Head Start classes in Bayfront classrooms, equipping them with vacant classroom space at Bayfront provided at no cost. In turn, Catholic Charities utilized dollars provided through a federal Head Start grant to hire staff, furnish each classroom, and purchase instructional materials. In describing the educational pipeline at Bayfront, the Judy Center coordinator said,

So once they [children] age out of the two-year-old program [the early learning playgroups], we started talking to families right before their birthday about the Head Start application. We would then introduce them to the Head Start staff and that whole transition really works seamlessly because parents almost expect like they were here, so they're supposed to go over there next. And then that also helps with that transition over to pre-K as well.

The Judy Center programming helped to contribute several additional years of extended school time that would not have been available at a school that lacked these robust supports.

The Bayfront Judy Center hosted regular early learning playgroups that enabled local children, typically two- and three-year-olds, to attend sessions regularly, both with and without their parents. The Judy Center coordinator described the scope of playgroup programming by saying,

So we have one playgroup that happens four days a week with the two-year-olds. So they come in from 8:00 to 12:00 and it's about six students and parents who have the ability to drop their child off while they're able to take care of some things. And then they come back at 12:00 and pick them up. They have a curriculum. They use a Frog Street curriculum, which is similar to what they use at Head Start. And then we have other playgroups like fun with foreign language and shakeout facilities. So those are play-based playgroups where they're singing, dancing, playing games, doing crafts, and things like that. So families really enjoy that. We have monthly playgroups that may be related to themes, related to Head start or pre-K themes like community helpers. We'll also have someone come in and talk about being a police officer or last month it was a movement, so families were invited to work out with their children.

These playgroups allowed children to extend their learning time beyond what was typically offered in a traditional school environment. While the playgroups were implemented through the Bayfront Judy Center, they were open to all interested Bayfront parents and communicated as extended learning time opportunities. As with most community school and Judy Center offerings, programs were also open and available to the entire Bayfront community.

At three years old, children in the Bayfront community became eligible for Judy Center and Head Start programming housed within the school. Through a partnership with Catholic Charities, Bayfront was able to offer two Head Start classrooms with enrollment of 18 students each as part of its extended learning time offerings. Head Start is a federally funded program that aims to provide full-day early learning classroom experiences to low-income three- and four-year-olds. A Bayfront teacher talked about the early learning offerings, including the Head Start classes and the early childhood playgroups at Bayfront, by saying,

I'm not sure how they do it at other schools, but here we actually have a Catholic Charities Head Start program within our building and then the Judy Center runs a toddler's program, so we get the families in early. The toddlers program starts with two-year-olds. So then, those families are getting exposure to the school building early and they know what resources we have. And then even with the younger families, they have like monthly diaper banks, and they have different playgroups and different things like that. So exposing the children and the families to the building early, I think makes it easier.

After-School Activities.

After-school programming is critical for not only adding extra hours for learning and enrichment, but also for providing parents, many of whom have difficult work schedules, a much-needed reprieve (Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, 2016; Blank et al., 2003; Bireda, 2009). Bayfront offered several after-school activities and clubs (e.g., gardening club, chess club, and the Springboard after-school program), which were particularly important because of the school's daily early dismissal time at 2:10 p.m. A Bayfront teacher described extended learning time offerings with the following statement,

We have an extended learning program here that runs three days out of the week, Tuesday through Thursday. So we dismiss at 2:10 and they're [students] here until about 4:00, so they get that extra support and those extra learning levels. And outside of just math and literacy, we've also included a resource class.²⁴ So for each grade level, the extended learning program runs from pre-K through fifth grade, so they're kind of getting a little bit extra of everything.

²⁴ Resource classes fall outside of the core subject areas of reading, math, science, and social studies. At Bayfront, the resource offerings included two visual arts, physical education, and computers/technology. Typically, students received one resource class each day, during which time core subject teachers worked on planning or grading.

The assistant principal also described the extended day offerings by saying,

Yeah, there's a gardening club, we have a girl's club, I don't know what it's called but there's a community member that comes in, financed by the Judy Center or United Way who does crafts with the girls and they just have girl time. They do nails and cool spa stuff. After-school programming is a key element of pillar two of the community school strategy. Robust after-school offerings enable students to extend and enhance their academic learning, explore enrichment activities that can fuel interests and passions, and provide much needed relief to working parents who are unable to pick up their children at the earlier dismissal time.

Summer Programming.

The interviews also surfaced summer programming as an area of extended learning activities available to Bayfront students. Bayfront offered a summer program, Camp Curiosity, targeted at younger students (pre-kindergarten and kindergarten) and facilitated through the Bayfront Judy Center. The Judy Center coordinator provided details on the scope of the program, "Yeah, so Camp Curiosity is our summer program. It runs for five weeks Monday through Thursday. It's academics in the morning with enrichment in the afternoon and then field trips all day Thursday." While Camp Curiosity was an extended learning opportunity offered in the summer for younger students at Bayfront, unfortunately there was no summer programming was available for older Bayfront students.

Pillar Three – Family and Community Engagement

Of all the research conducted on the four pillars of community schools at Bayfront, pillar three was the most commonly mentioned. The interview process surfaced four key practices connected to family and community engagement: 1) family involvement events, 2) access to

material resources, 3) access to information and workshops, and 4) case management support. Traditionally, parent involvement is connected to convenings like PTA meetings or activities like bake sales. In community schools, this slate of activities extends to include the dissemination of material resources like food and diapers, the provision of vital information through workshops, and the personalized support of families in need through case management services.

Family Involvement Events.

Several participants described a series of family involvement events that occurred throughout the year. As I discussed earlier, some of these events were academic in nature and aimed to build parent knowledge and awareness around important areas of learning. A Bayfront teacher described this set of offerings and the intended outcome of hosting these types of events by saying, “And by providing activities like literacy night, math night and educating our families on how they can support the child at home will help improve academics and attendance as well.” The theory of action around hosting these academic events was that they provided an opportunity for students to get excited about learning, for parents to get more connected with daily instructional content, and for parents to reinforce messages around the importance of education. Many of these activities also enabled learning-at-home experiences, equipping parents with the expertise and materials needed to reinforce school-day learning at home. Learning nights at Bayfront occurred quarterly and were promoted heavily by the teachers, principal, and community school coordinator to ensure they were well attended. Typically, around 50 to 60 families participated in learning nights, representing around 15% of the total school population.

Several staff members mentioned another set of events that were targeted towards parents but were more social in nature. The school principal commented on these types of program offerings by saying,

So donuts with dads, muffins with moms, grandparents got Chick-fil-A, and there was one other thing, and oh, Valentine's Day was another special thing. So just again, ways of letting the parents know, hey, this is what we're about here at Bayfront. We're about academics and social learning, but we're also about promoting family.

These social events were targeted at connecting families with the school and helping to ease the divide between school and community. Unlike the academic workshops that were designed to extend classroom learning, these social events were targeted at bringing more parents into the building and creating an improved sense of energy and positivity. They often occurred during arrival and dismissal, when parents were already in the building, thus providing low barriers to participation and increasing the number of parents and community members who regularly participated.

Access to Material Resources.

Bayfront used material resource distribution as a way to engage families and community members. Bayfront distributed food through its food pantry, clothes through the clothing closet, and diapers. The community school coordinator described the types of items families needed and the established partnerships to acquire those items by saying,

Families are looking for essential things like strollers, car seats, [and] clothing for their small child. So those are some of the biggest needs and we're able to provide that through our partnerships with like ShareBaby, Healthcare Access Maryland, Baltimore City Community College (BCCC), and things like that.

The community school coordinator established partnerships with non-profit organizations and city entities to provide resources like food, clothing, and diapers to families at Bayfront. She formed a partnership with ShareBaby, a local non-profit that collects diapers and gently used clothing, toys, and other materials and redistributes these items to low-income communities. Partnerships with Healthcare Access Maryland were utilized to make referrals to healthcare providers, while a partnership with Baltimore City Community College provided General Educational Development (GED) courses to community members.

It is important to note that while members of the school community were the primary audience, the resources were also available to the larger community. Individuals who were not connected to the school participated in many of the resource giveaways. The community school coordinator talked about the larger swath of community members who benefited from the community school offerings by saying,

And just all kinds of people [both those connected to the school and individuals from the larger community]. I've had people from just even out in the community, they don't even attend this school that have participated in their programs. They participate in the food drives and the diaper drives and the clothing drives. So they've done all kinds of programs to help different people among their community.

Key goals of the community school coordinator were to get parents more connected to the school through the distribution of materials resources like food and diapers and to increase parent participation in events.

Access to Information and Workshops.

Bayfront also provided information and workshops to support family and community members, such as ESOL classes, GED classes, parenting classes through the Chicago Parent

Program, financial literacy workshops, and workshops designed for those who are struggling with trauma. A teacher shared,

And I know up there [in the parent room] they'll have dual language classes, so ESOL classes for parents up there. I know they've had parenting classes there as well. I haven't attended it but I know there's a gentleman that comes and speaks to the fathers, kind of parenting but geared towards male role models. And I know they'll do mommy and me classes up there as well. So all of that stuff. There's been some good outreach bringing the community in for those events.

The community school coordinator and the Judy Center staff worked together to deliver a variety of programs targeted at the parents of early learners. One of Judy Center's offerings was the Chicago Parenting Program (CHIP) a research-based intervention designed around eight, one-hour sessions delivered weekly to a cohort of parents of early learners. Through CHIP, parents watched a series of videos around parenting practices and engaged in open discussion about the parenting techniques shown in each video. The videos vignettes provided a starting point for discussion of parenting best practices presented in a communal and non-judgmental way. CHIP programming was delivered using a "learn to earn" model in which participants were compensated for their attendance and completion of weekly homework assignments. Grant funding enabled each CHIP participant to receive \$15 per class attended and an additional \$15 per week for assignment completion, to motivate parents to participate. The Judy Center coordinator described the CHIP program as follows,

It is a group for parents to help them to deal with their stressors and things. So we implemented a program called the Chicago Parenting Program (CHIP). CHIP is kind of

teaching new strategies for the parent and then strengthening families when we bring the whole group together.

In an effort to continue to grow the workshop offerings at Bayfront, the community school coordinator was in the process of building out a more robust parent and community room that could serve as both a centralized place for workshops as well as a welcoming space for families to convene during the day.

Case Management Support.

Participant interviews surfaced a final area of family and community engagement focused on individualized case management supports for families, delivered primarily by the community school coordinator in response to specific challenges. Direct case management support often represents a significant amount of a community school coordinator's time (Blank et al., 2010; Lubell, 2011; Mayger & Hochbein, 2019). Community schools are usually located in low-income communities that face challenges ranging from housing instability to food scarcity and utility cutoffs, requiring individualized responses for each family's unique situation. The community school coordinator expounded on one recent case management interaction as an example of the type of support provided. She stated,

I just had a family recently who was behind on rent as well as the water bill. And they were really behind. So I was able to connect with the landlord and talk to the landlord, letting him know that we had resources. We went back to the City of Refuge since they have the program there that helps. The parent was able to come in and sit with us to use the computer and resources to apply for the different programs to be able to get help. And he actually was able to stay in his home.

As mentioned previously, the City of Refuge is a non-profit organization that established a partnership with Bayfront through the United Way to connect community members with social service resources. Other partnerships that helped with case management support included the Family Tree, which helped connect families with childcare scholarships, and Healthcare Access Maryland, which made referrals to medical providers. The community school coordinator established a referral system to help track case management support. The referral system was comprised of a basic intake form where parents included their name, phone number, address, student's name(s), and a description of the challenge they were facing. Most frequently, this form was filled out directly by the community school coordinator or the Judy Center coordinator since often times the intake process was done in person with the parent meeting with the coordinator to describe the challenges they were facing. This referral process was described with the following statement,

Usually they'll come in and complete an intake form and then we'll help them with their services. And then we'll follow up in about 30 days to see if they receive those services. If it's something that we have here, like diapers, we'll let them leave with like some diapers and some materials and resources that they can connect with. If it's something healthcare wise, we'll fill out a referral to like Healthcare Access Maryland and connect them that way. If they need childcare, we'll connect them with the Family Tree and help them with like childcare scholarships and things like that.

Case management can be a taxing and time-consuming process due to the nuanced nature of family needs.

Pillar Four – Collaborative Leadership Practices

Collaborative leadership practices are critical to successful community schools. Collaborative leadership practices involve relationship building with internal members of a school team, as well as with outside partners. Internal collaboration may include conversations and planning between leadership team members like the principal, assistant principals, and the community school coordinator, or planning efforts with instructional staff and teachers. Collaborative leadership practices may also include external relationships with parents, community partners, contractual partners, and other entities who help further the community school strategy. These leadership practices include establishing a regular meeting schedule, outlining goals, signing partnership documents or memoranda of understanding (MOU) that outline the terms of the collaboration, determining key program implementer roles, designing the program structure, and communicating with the broader community. For external relationships, many of these practices, such as setting up regular meetings to assess progress and make adjustments, and coordinating additional support for families and students, are what can make or break successful community school implementation.

At Bayfront, the school principal and the community school coordinator frequently practiced collaborative leadership to ensure their visions were aligned prior to including other individuals in the school community into the planning process. Beyond the principal and community school coordinator, there were an informal “community team” comprised of the community school coordinator, the Judy Center Coordinator, and the school secretary. These three individuals, whose roles were the most family- and community-facing, collaborated frequently to plan events, align schedules, publicize community school activities, and ensure all the details were appropriately ironed out for any activity aligned with the community school strategy. Beyond this

core “community team,” a litany of teachers, school staff, parents, community members, and school partners were also essential to the implementation of the community school strategy at Bayfront.

The leadership team identified a number of external collaborations with non-profit providers. Internally and externally, they established collaborative meetings to plan events and problem solve around common challenges. External collaborators included ShareBaby, Catholic Charities, HealthCare Access Maryland, the Family Tree, Baltimore City Community College, and the Fund for Educational Excellence.

Internal and external partnerships helped to provide a robust web of early childhood experiences at Bayfront. Bayfront’s community school program and Judy Center collaborated extremely well, not just because of the overlap between the purposes of both initiatives, but also due to the community school coordinator’s previous position as the Bayfront Judy Center’s family services coordinator. The community school coordinator spoke to the spirit of partnership amongst the two entities by saying,

We do a lot of collaboration, switching over into this role as the community school coordinator and coming from the Judy Center, I always say, Judy Center is supposed to support families birth to five in a similar manner to how the community school supports older learners. And it’s so much, a wealth of resources, the community school coordinator role is that now instead of just being able to serve those birth to five, we can bridge that gap and be able to serve the school community as a whole and be able to partner and bring all of those services.

Other stakeholders drew direct connections between the functions of the Judy Center and the community school program, believing that outside of the age demographic served, both programs

were similar in their goals to deliver resources to the wider community. One Bayfront teacher said, “The purpose of the Judy Center is to support families from birth to school. So to me it’s always felt like a community school.” Collaborative leadership practices in early childhood that expanded beyond the Judy Center partnership included collaborations with nonprofit organizations like the Fund for Educational Excellence, which helped administer the CHIP program; Catholic Charities, which ran the two Head Start classes at Bayfront; and ShareBaby, which provided diapers, baby clothing, and other toys and equipment to early learners. The collaborations were strong and consistent, as evidenced by the ample, informal meetings and connections between the Judy Center coordinator and the community school coordinator.

There was also evidence of collaborative leadership practices between the community school coordinator and a multitude of service providers. Some of these collaborations occurred within the integrated student support space and involved academic providers like the Literacy Lab and Springboard Collaborative. Multiple stakeholder groups spoke to the benefits of the school’s partnership with the Maryland Food Bank, which provided groceries to stock the Bayfront food pantry program. This partnership was particularly critical in light of the fact that Bayfront, and much of South Baltimore for that matter, was considered a food desert with limited access to fresh meat and produce. One teacher spoke of these partnerships as evidence of external leadership, all orchestrated by the community school coordinator, to deliver important services within the school,

So when I think of community, I always try to, I think of the community as a whole. So we have a community member who has a business, it’s called Excellence Aesthetics. And she comes in and does a girls group for us, as an after-school program. We have partnerships with several of the churches in the neighborhood who help when it comes to things like the food bank and clothing drives, just keeping it in the community. We have a community

member, she's a grandmother here, and instead of hiring someone else, we hired her to come in and run a snowball stand. So keeping the community involved and making sure that the community knows what's going on here and building the community up as a whole outside of the building as well.

One critical actor in the area of collaborative leadership practices was the United Way of Central Maryland, which served as the lead agent for Bayfront. Lead agents are non-profit community-based programs that are designated as key implementation partners for community schools in Baltimore City. They are responsible for a variety of tasks including hiring and managing the community school coordinator and bringing additional resources and partnerships to their assigned schools. The United Way of Central Maryland served as the lead agent for Bayfront and four other schools located in south and southwest Baltimore.

Important collaborative leadership practices at Bayfront were facilitated in partnership with the team at the United Way. The United Way community school manager hosted monthly meetings that brought coordinators from the five United Way community schools together, allowing for regular collaboration. The Bayfront principal described the benefits of this regular meeting cadence by saying,

The community school coordinator has a lot of development on her work through the United Way. I know she meets regularly with her supervisor [the community school manager at the United Way] and they do regular collaborations [with the other United Way community schools]. We have I wanna say it's every couple months, a meeting with the United Way including the community school coordinator and the community school manager who supports her work, I guess, as kind of like a mentor. So the United Way, knowing our community and being active in our community does provide a lot of guidance

for the community school coordinator's work and I guess their side of the compliance as a provider.

The collaborative leadership of the United Way helped to expand opportunities at Bayfront. The school principal addressed this by saying,

But the partnerships are growing. The community school coordinator, she's been leveraging more resources. She's been really great at taking advantage of the volunteer resources at United Way to get some things rolling and to support her as a coordinator. She's taking great advantage of that. She's applied for a number of grants through the United Way and I know one of the things has been wanting is more after-school programming within the school.

One specific example of how collaborative leadership practices between the Bayfront community school program and the United Way yielded tangible benefits for the school is the recent library renovation. The assistant principal described this project by saying,

So last year, the community school coordinator and the Women's United Group at United Way adopted the library and did a fundraising and renovation project to give the library new breath. Originally, it wasn't being utilized as a library. They didn't have books. So they focused on that and leveraged the volunteers and the resources to get that into a suitable physical space.

After the project was completed, Bayfront maintained a functional library with books, comfortable spaces, and tables where kids could read, work in small groups, and parents could comfortably meet.

Bayfront demonstrated many attributes of effective collaborative leadership practices. At a functional level, with so many partnerships and programs, the leadership team had to maintain

constant communication around topics like scheduling and space. The Bayfront Judy Center coordinator talked about some of the techniques the team used to keep things organized. She shared, “Managing it isn’t a problem. We use calendars to plan that out and that’s why the community school coordinator and I had that meeting every Monday. So that we’re not both fighting for the auditorium.” This coordination was critical to managing space as well as parents’ scheduling needs. The community school coordinator stated,

I think in order to serve all the families, especially in our school, we have some families where they may have kids across four grade-level bands. So in order to make sure that we encompass and serve them together, we have to work together.

Alongside collaborating internally, members of the “community team” (community school coordinator, Judy Center coordinator, and the school secretary) at Bayfront also participated in a variety of committee meetings at the school. By attending these committee meetings, the team aimed to identify intersections between community initiatives. The Judy Center coordinator commented on the role of these committee meetings in the school’s programming, saying,

Yeah, so one thing that the community school coordinator and I both do is attend the different committee meetings throughout the school. So we’re at climate, we’re at attendance, we’re listening in to see what are the needs of the different groups within our building. Attending staff meetings, team meetings with like the pre-K team, the kindergarten team, and just kind of finding out what they need. And then those teams also report back to us, so they’re letting us know their plans for their grade levels as well as whatever their grade levels need. We’ll meet informally with administration, or administration sits in on some of these committees as well. So we’ll have opportunities to talk then.

Over the period of data exploration at Bayfront, there was ample evidence of all four pillars of the community school strategy. This is extremely impressive considering Bayfront was still in its initial stages of development as a community school. This evidence of strategy implementation across all four pillars was a testament to the school's robust, community-oriented infrastructure and the strong, determined leadership of the school principal and community school coordinator.

As stated previously, while evidence of all four community school pillars was evident at Bayfront, evidence of pillar three, focused on family and community engagement was the most prominent. There was also ample evidence of pillar four, collaborative leadership practices, exhibited in both the internal and external partnerships. While far less apparent, there were solid examples of pillar one, integrated student supports, at Bayfront including academic supports like tutoring and health and wellness supports like the mobile dentist. The least mentioned of the four community school pillars at Bayfront was pillar two, extended school time. While there were examples of after-school clubs and summer programming for early learners, interviewees discussed this pillar far less frequently and there were also comments from interview participants reflecting the desire to have a more robust set of extended-day supports. I discuss these challenges surfaced during the interview process later in the findings section. In the next section, I address research question two by highlighting the successes and challenges of community schools strategy implementation at Bayfront.

Research Question Two: Successes and Challenges Associated with the Community School Strategy at Bayfront

The second portion of the findings section discusses the major successes of the implementation of the community school strategy at Bayfront. Participants identified several

successes of strategy implementation including: 1) the development of a welcoming environment, 2) buy-in from Bayfront personnel to the strategy, 3) the responsiveness of the community school strategy to feedback from students and families, and 4) the robust ramp-up in programs and services to provide much needed support for the community. In this portion of the results section, I also provide an overview of the challenges associated with community school rollout at Bayfront and areas for improvement. The six challenges surfaced by interviewees included: 1) challenges around communication, 2) challenges posed by the Covid school closures, 3) challenges around the lack of a deep connection with parents, 4) challenges serving a Latinx population, 5) challenges associated with the lack of extended-day opportunities for students, and 6) challenges that are even too large for community schools to address.

Successes Associated with the Community School Strategy at Bayfront

Four major themes emerged in the research on key successes of community school implementation at Bayfront. These successes include: 1) the development of a welcoming environment, 2) buy-in from Bayfront personnel to the strategy, 3) the responsiveness of the community school strategy to feedback from students and families, and 4) the robust ramp-up in programs and services to provide a much needed support for the community.

Overall, these successes are good indicators of strong implementation of the strategy during Bayfront's first four years as a community school. This welcoming orientation to the community, vision alignment amongst school staff, and delivery of responsive programming are indicators of effective implementation of the community school strategy (Oakes et al., 2017; Blank et al., 2003).

The Development of a Welcoming Environment

Participants acknowledged that the development of a welcoming environment for families was a successful aspect of the community school strategy implemented at Bayfront. Interview participants noted several factors that contributed to a welcoming environment including 1) the school principal's open and positive approach, 2) a school-wide emphasis on kindness, and 3) the staff's welcoming demeanor. There was a resounding number of comments on how people played an integral role in developing a welcoming environment. One parent shared her positive outlook on the school, including the teachers, principal, and other staff members by saying,

But overall the school's great, teachers are great, principal's great, everyone is just amazing that works here. And they always make you feel welcome. Your kids definitely will learn.

They definitely will. These teachers, they care about what the children are learning. And that's the best part about this school, they care.

In general, interviewees described the school environment as overwhelmingly positive and elevated the school principal as a key factor in the creation of a welcoming atmosphere. Creating a welcoming environment was a key tenant of the principal's leadership style. A Bayfront parent spoke about the principal's welcoming approach saying, "Like everybody, all teachers, all students, all parents. He [the principal] always makes sure that you feel welcome when you come into the school if he's around." This sentiment was reinforced by the United Way supervisor who spoke to the principal's welcoming orientation and how it impacted implementation of the community school strategy by saying,

I think the fact that, well, I think the principal's leadership is an incredible strength to a community and I mean specifically to a community school effort. I think the way that he approaches leadership is with just a lot of support, a mindset of just people first and whether

that is a tiny person in front of him in pre-K or his staff or an external partner. And so that just sort of democratic and sort of humane sense of like shared humanity, is just always at the forefront with him. And that I think is really helpful for a community school that's able to think of a student as not just a set of data outcomes but really as a holistic person and make sure that they are served and that their needs are met on multiple fronts.

Multiple respondents talked about how the principal knew the name of every student and would give hugs to many of them each day upon entry. I witnessed this over the course of several visits, where we would walk the halls together and the principal would introduce me to a kindergarten student in jest, by providing a hug and saying "oh there he is, [hugging a student], here is my old friend."

The principal's positive attitude and demeanor created fertile ground for the community school strategy to manifest. Bayfront parents commented, "They [students] all go up and hug him. They love him," and "He knows all of them, from what I can tell, he knows all of the kids by their names." Multiple interviewees referenced the principal's warm and welcoming orientation to the students, staff, and families at Bayfront. This is a subtle but critically important attribute, often taken for granted in the community schools research. The community school strategy, by its nature, is reliant on creating an open and welcoming environment for families. The principal's deep connection with students was explicitly referenced by all participating parents. One parent reflected on the relationship between her kindergarten-aged son and the principal,

The principal, he's amazing. My son absolutely loves him. He makes a personal connection, I think with every student here at the school. He is not just a principal that comes to do his job. And he's very heartfelt. So the principal, he really makes an impact on the community.

Several interview respondents also mentioned the school's practice of morning video announcements as contributing to and demonstrating Bayfront's welcoming orientation. Each morning, the principal recorded a three-to-five-minute video segment that was broadcast daily and shared announcements and positive messages. He launched this practice during the Covid lockdowns to share information with students and families, recognizing the importance of creating a personal connection between families and the school. Even after returning to in-person learning, the school continued the morning video messages, which were broadcast to each classroom. Several interviewees mentioned these video announcements as an important mechanism to elevate the personal connections that were at the heart of the Bayfront experience. Kindness was a key anchor of Bayfront and it permeated across the school staff. The principal's modeling of positivity and kindness was infectious and influenced many of the personal interactions at the school. The United Way supervisor spoke to the principal's emphasis on kindness by sharing,

The school principal speaks about kindness as being a core value of the school and I have felt that more strongly each year that I've partnered with the school from the moment that I walk up to the school building, and I go in and out of a lot of schools in the course of my week or month, and so it continues to stand out to me like when I walk up to that school, it's extremely likely that a student, a very young, small student, sometimes will hold the door for me and I say thank you. And it's also extremely likely that I might see a difficult interaction happening between two students and an adult is trying to pick up a moment of kindness and elevate that in that student interaction.

During my visits to Bayfront, I frequently witnessed many small moments of kindness. For example, I observed an interaction between the principal and the parent of a student who had had a behavioral crisis the previous day and threw a chair in the classroom. Rather than approaching

the parent negatively, the principal talked about the additional supports the school could provide, how kids sometimes make poor choices, and the importance of working collaboratively to address behavioral challenges. Through this interaction, the principal's message was clear, "We are going to work together, both family and school, to make things better for the child." This elevation of kindness, respect, and a spirit of welcoming seeded fertile ground for the implementation of an effective community school program.

While the school principal contributed to the creation of a welcoming environment through his actions and emphasis on kindness, this modeling influenced staff interactions across the school. Multiple respondents also elevated the community school coordinator, teachers, secretary, and other school staff members as contributing to the school's welcoming and positive feeling. One parent commented explicitly around this sentiment by saying,

So, it's just the fact that they go above and beyond, just their role as a principal or a teacher or a staff member or people in the Judy center. I, myself, was so touched by what they do here at the school that I became a volunteer and so that I could do community outreach and, it just, it moved me to a point that I wanted to do more.

Interviewees described how the welcoming approach at Bayfront permeated across the entire staff, extending far beyond the principal and community school coordinator. One parent summed this up by saying,

But [the school principal] does such a good job. You don't have to really go to him to ask anything, like no concerns, no problems. But I'm sure if I needed to, he would solve them for me, but everybody else does a pretty good job.

While a welcoming environment does not directly translate into successful community school implementation, it is an essential requisite. It is critical for parents, students, and community

partners to want to be at and engage with the school if the community school strategy is to be successful. At Bayfront, the successful establishment of a welcoming environment provided a necessary foundation for the implementation of a robust community school strategy.

Buy-In from Bayfront Personnel to the Strategy

Interviewees also surfaced the buy-in from Bayfront personnel to the community school strategy as another success. The community school literature frequently references the importance of key actors, in particular the school principal and the community school coordinator, as pivotal figures in the strategy's implementation (Richardson, 2009; Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, 2016, McMahon et al., 2000; Bartlett & Freeze, 2018; Sanders, 2018). These key actors are important to strategy implementation for a multitude of reasons including their ability to solicit buy-in from school personnel. At Bayfront, there was ample evidence that the leadership team successfully established buy-in to the community school strategy from multiple stakeholder groups including school administrators, teachers, and community partners. Numerous interview respondents recognized school leadership as essential for vision-setting and communication of the community school strategy to colleagues, which in turn led to elevated levels of buy-in from school personnel.

The school leadership at Bayfront helped generate buy-in for the community school strategy by: 1) emphasizing to school staff the importance of serving families and connecting this to student success, 2) arguing that the school and community are one conjoined entity, and 3) empowering those most connected with community school strategy implementation as leaders. Bayfront leadership constantly emphasized the importance of serving families and its connection to student success. The principal and community school coordinator communicated how programming like tutoring, parent learning nights, and extended-day offerings all supported the

academic success of Bayfront students. One Bayfront teacher said, “That’s always been the principal’s goal, to promote a positive community for all, it was an ongoing process to get where we are now.” During the interview process, staff members echoed the principal’s sentiment and were able to connect this welcoming environment to student outcomes like improved school attendance, higher levels of community engagement, and greater enthusiasm about learning. Many other interview respondents noted the very deliberate emphasis on the importance of community to the overall success of the school. While conversations with the school staff and observations conducted during staff meetings demonstrated the importance of academic progress at Bayfront, there was clear implicit and explicit messaging that community involvement was essential for student success. Teachers voiced their support for the community school strategy as a means for better connecting with families, and expressed confidence that stronger connections with parents would yield positive results for their students.

The leadership team also generated buy-in for the community school strategy at Bayfront by arguing that the school and community are one conjoined entity. School personnel acknowledged that the community school strategy was a means of helping students in school by supporting their families outside of school. When sharing his vision for the school and community as a conjoined entity, the principal acknowledged,

I always wanted to provide [access to community resources], not just for the students, but for the community. The parents, and then the community where the kids live. So I always, and as a school, you have a big building, you have a lot of space, you have a lot of resources, you have a lot of people. So I always thought, “How can we not just support kids, but their families?”

This view of the school and community as one conjoined entity was echoed in the leadership team's rhetoric, as well as in the way the school allocated limited resources like school funding. The principal talked about seeing "school per pupil dollars" as interchangeable with "community dollars" as long as they were serving the larger school community. He acknowledged the coherence between both school and family within the budget by saying,

In my mind school dollars are school community dollars. So I don't think of that as, okay.

Well, we're taking from the school to give to the community. Like I just think of everything that we get is for our school community, whether its kids and family. So I don't ever think of it as, well that's dollars we're having less because we're supporting community schools.

Like those are our dollars. To me it all supports this community, and so I don't think twice about utilizing funds if we have them to support community and community events.

Throughout the interview process, Bayfront teachers talked emphatically about parent participation in activities like the food pantry program and the Judy Center diaper giveaways, acknowledging the benefit these programs provided for many families. The principal's messaging of the school and community as one conjoined entity was echoed not only in the comments by Bayfront staff members, but also in their enthusiasm for family-directed events. During the staff meeting I attended, the community school coordinator enthusiastically presented about the upcoming Family Literacy Night, resulting in nearly a dozen volunteers who committed to assisting with the event.

Another strategy for building staff buy-in was empowering the implementation team with the tools necessary for success. Using a strategy of empowered leadership, the principal entrusted those closest to the community school work with a great degree of ownership. This was particularly true of the aforementioned informal "community team," which was most connected with

implementation of the community school strategy. The principal's management style focused on staff empowerment, support, and getting out of people's way. Interviewees referenced the principal's openness to new ideas, out-of-the box thinking, and work to endorse nearly everything that would be a positive support to the students, school, or community. This leadership orientation built buy-in by providing greater staff ownership of community school strategy implementation. The principal maintained an attitude of "getting out of people's way" and allowing them to facilitate community programming. The community school supervisor from the United Way said,

I feel like with the principal's leadership and the way he is, I think it has contributed to the success of it. You could have a micromanaging principal that says, "No, I don't want that. I want it this way or that way." I think they've been able to operate and freely implement what they need to implement without so many hands in the pot, which I think is a benefit because then they can really get down to the work of what they need to do rather than sitting in meetings with the principal and him telling them, "No, I don't think that's good. I think that's good. I don't think... I want to do this."

By employing a strategy of empowered leadership, the school principal generated greater ownership and buy-in from the staff members most closely associated with community school implementation. This empowered leadership not only helped school staff buy in to the strategy, but also enabled the ability to create, think outside of the box, and imagine what community school implementation could look like without the fear of limitations.

Responsiveness of the Community School Strategy to Feedback from Students and Families

One area of success that was apparent in my data collection was the responsiveness of the community school strategy to feedback from students and families, in formalized structures like

the district required needs assessment, and in informal structures like conversations with parents. Responsiveness to students and families is essential for effective implementation of the community school strategy since it is important to meet families where they are and provide services that are needed in the community. By consistently querying families, using both formal and informal structures, community school implementers are able to shape offerings that best support the needs of the communities they serve. The leadership team at Bayfront employed multiple structures to respond to feedback provided by families and used this information to shape strategy implementation.

All Baltimore City community schools, and most community schools nationally, conduct periodic needs assessments to gauge community needs and assets. The community school coordinator talked about this needs assessment document as a formal structure to solicit community feedback and inform community school programming. The formal needs assessment process typically occurs every other year in Baltimore City schools. The process usually involves data collection through surveys, interviews, or focus groups to gather demographic information, gauge parent involvement, and identify areas of need such as struggles with housing instability, food scarcity, or extended care needs. The needs assessment also surveys where parents and community members can contribute to strategy implementation through donating time or expertise. The community school manager at the United Way talked about both the importance of this process and Bayfront's success in conducting the needs assessment by saying,

So I think they [the Bayfront team] did a good job of analyzing the community strengths, weaknesses, what we need, and what's already available, using, what do they call it? An asset map to see what we have. And they've been really good about filling in and taking suggestions and needs and trying to roll with it.

While the needs assessment process represents a formalized structure for gathering community input, much of the feedback garnered from parents was more casual in nature. Several interviewees referenced informal structures for garnering feedback from family and community members, such as conversations with parents immediately after programming or staff reflections on attendance and reception to programming. The staff at Bayfront used these measures of feedback to shape strategy implementation at the school. The community school coordinator emphasized this point by saying,

So we also try to make sure the programs just make sense for the community. Like I'm not gonna do a hot yoga class for parents if they're not interested in doing that. But just making sure it's something that the parents actually want, and will participate in. Or if it's something that they may not have thought of or experienced, maybe just having like one or two sessions and seeing what the feedback is, and then if it's something that they enjoy, we'll continue it. If it's something they're like, no thanks, then we'll just find another program.

As stated above, staff oftentimes obtained feedback from parents on the quality and pertinence of community school programming through quick check-ins immediately following the event. The community school coordinator frequently queried parent participants with a quick “what did you think of the workshop” or “was the information presented helpful” in order to ascertain relevance and impact. While these feedback structures were not formalized through a standing parent body like a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or a structured survey or focus group, the Bayfront staff members did utilize the information gathered through conversations with parents to adjust programming to better benefit the community.

The principal went on to reinforce how important it was that Bayfront staff were responsive to feedback from families, but he took a more longitudinal perspective, addressing program improvements coming from family input that spanned several years. In his interview, he said,

We're learning and evolving and developing and adding on to what's worked, so this year we're doing this. Those are great and next year we're gonna do those things because we know how to do them well, but we're going to continue to add.

A parent respondent reflected on the growing nature of the community school initiative at Bayfront and its responsiveness to the community by saying,

Every year they kinda feel out what's working and continue expanding on what's working. And if something isn't working, they're able to kinda pivot and they're good about realizing and getting feedback from us as to how we can form a true partnership especially with the community.

Each of the three parent interviewees expressed an appreciation for the responsiveness to feedback demonstrated by community school staff.

While there are real benefits to the responsive nature of community school programming at Bayfront, there was an acknowledgement that the school could benefit from more formalized feedback structures beyond the needs assessment process. While the school had established a strong and welcoming environment, many of the interactions between parents and staff felt transactional in nature without an established Parent Teacher Association, formalized structures for parents to provide feedback or input, and opportunities for parent leadership, ownership, and decision-making. This major finding is explored more fully in the discussion section to follow.

Robust Ramp-Up in Programs and Services to Provide Much Needed Support for the Community

One major success that was apparent throughout the data collection process was the robust ramp-up in programs and services to provide much needed support for the community. This ramp-up was particularly successful when considering the truncated timeframe in which the community school infrastructure was developed. Over the course of four years of implementation, two of which were impacted by Covid closures, Bayfront had amassed a vast number of programs and partnerships. One parent commented on the rapid growth of the community school program by saying, “I think they’ve accomplished great things in a relatively short period of time.” Many respondents reflected on the growing scale of the community school program at Bayfront, then proceeded to list the new programs such as the gardening club, muffins for moms, donuts for dads, and several early childhood offerings through the Judy Center. Some interview respondents described the growth in community programming as “exponential” or “a huge increase,” echoing the idea that over the past four years since the community school strategy was hatched, and in particular, in this post Covid era, implementation at Bayfront was dramatically growing. The assistant principal at Bayfront focused on what he described as the positive progress of the community school initiative at Bayfront and the tremendous opportunities that lay ahead by saying,

Especially now that we have a lot of momentum building through the positive vibes and the trust that we’ve developed with the community. So like, of the good things that are going on right now, I just see tremendous stuff down there, like stuff we are not even thinking about yet.

The rapid implementation of the community school strategy at Bayfront was made possible by several factors. As mentioned previously, school leadership, in particular the principal and

community school coordinator, bought into the strategy, shared an aligned vision, and were able to articulate why the community school strategy was important. The existence of an already welcoming and parent-friendly school environment made implementation of the community school strategy more feasible since families already had a positive affiliation with the school. The presence of strong partners that were familiar with the community school strategy, like the United Way, or were already operating community school adjacent programming, like the Bayfront Judy Center, also contributed to laying the groundwork for rapid expansion.

Challenges with Community School Implementation at Bayfront

While overall, implementation of the community school strategy at Bayfront was successful according to several measures, there were some challenges, many of which are articulated in this section. Understanding the nature and scope of these challenges may help provide a roadmap for future evolution of the strategy at the school. I chose to only elevate the challenges that were mentioned by multiple interviewees and across multiple stakeholder groups.²⁵ The six challenges that stood out as major themes included: 1) challenges around communication, 2) challenges posed by the Covid school closures, 3) challenges around the lack of a deep connection with parents, 4) challenges serving a Latinx population, 5) challenges associated with the lack of extended day opportunities for students, and 6) challenges that are even too large for community schools to address.

²⁵ Other challenges that were mentioned, although not by enough respondents to warrant their inclusion in the findings section include: challenges with funding, challenges with district support and miscommunication, and challenges with involving hard-to-reach parents.

Challenges Around Communication

Interview participants shared multiple challenges around communication. These communication challenges involved both internal challenges around staff coordination and external communication challenges focused on teachers' challenges with effectively and consistently connecting with parents.

Bayfront teachers identified the need for more consistent information about community school activities at Bayfront, as well as a more comprehensive listing of programs. Consistent communication channels allow school staff to stay up-to-date with the many programs and initiatives offered and communicate these opportunities to families who might benefit. Similarly, sharing a comprehensive listing of programming enables school staff members to better connect families with the litany of resources available. One Bayfront teacher shared,

That's something that we could probably do better and maybe it's a weekly blast from the community school coordinator to the teachers to inform them of the things that are going on. We communicate on ClassDojo²⁶ and all the events and services are posted by the community school coordinator on ClassDojo, which every teacher receives on their Bayfront account, every teacher gets that. Whether or not they're paying attention to them as much, I don't know.

While ClassDojo was surfaced as a primary mechanism for communicating community school activities internally, not all Bayfront staff members used the platform regularly and not all events were posted in a timely fashion. Overall, it did seem like the internal staff communication structure at Bayfront would benefit from a teacher survey to ascertain the best modes of communication (e-

²⁶ Class Dojo is a web-based application used by many teachers at Bayfront to report student academic progress and behavior to parents. It is also used school-wide to send important messages to families.

mail, paper newsletter, ClassDojo, or multiple communication vehicles) and a regular cadence of information sharing. By establishing a consistent forum for sharing information and ensuring that this information was updated regularly, school staff would possess the most current and relevant information about community school offerings to share with students and families, thereby leading to better participation and improved benefits of the community school program.

There were also challenges related to parent communication. For teachers, consistent communication involved having regular access to parents through updated phone numbers or a regular, in-person pick-up schedule that would allow them to communicate about events, concerns, or updates. One of the most elucidating responses came from a Bayfront teacher, who stated,

I think this year it's been a little hectic again, I just again don't know if it's on our end or on the parents' end that they're not, the participation is just... Like we send flyers, we send robocalls. We ask, is it just something that the parents aren't interested in? I don't know what the disconnect is or why the lack of participation or interest in it. You could do more parent surveys, but you're already not getting back the surveys. So maybe virtual surveys instead of paper ones or like someone being out there at drop off and pick up to have parents vote for something like a walking survey like go around and ask parents, "Which one would you prefer? What would you like us to have?"

This teacher's response reflects exasperation with how to best communicate with parents in a consistent way. The teachers expressed frustration that despite multiple attempts to engage parents, using several modalities, many parents were not consistently participating. A consistent system for communication with parents is important so that families can inform the school of outstanding needs that can be met through the community school strategy and school staff can connect with parents around home supports to improve student learning. In community schools

where the communication apparatus is inadequate you may end up with families who are not informed of the community school offerings and children who lack substantial learning supports that could be provided in the home environment.

Challenges Posed by the Covid School Closures

One of the primary challenges to community school implementation that was cited throughout the interviews was challenges posed by the Covid school closures. The Covid pandemic had a prominent impact on schools over the past four years, forcing much of the community school programming online. While some schools were able to successfully pivot during this timeframe, it was much more challenging at Bayfront since it was just introducing the community school strategy to families and school personnel during the timeframe that schools closed for virtual learning. This also created a distinct difference after schools reopened two years later, since the introduction of the new coordinator in summer 2021 also corresponded with more visible and robust community school implementation as students returned to in-person learning and parents were once again welcomed into the building. One teacher explained the juxtaposition before and after the pandemic by saying,

I think it's just blown up then. Because we had some programming but nothing like we have now before the pandemic when they started. So I guess yeah, they needed a couple years too and with the turnover and whatnot, even though the previous community school coordinator was great at bringing in partners and bringing in stuff. I just see more of the execution now.

Covid adversely impacted the rollout of the community school strategy at Bayfront from multiple angles including limiting parent access to the physical school building during the early

stages of lockdown. Baltimore City Public Schools, including Bayfront Elementary, closed its buildings to students and families in response to the Governor's Executive Order starting on March 13, 2020. These Covid closures coincided with the launch of the community school strategy at Bayfront, as the coordinator had been hired in early 2020 and after initial training and onboarding, began reporting on-site in February 2020. Having only been present in the school building for around a month and a half before moving to a fully remote structure for nearly a year (Baltimore City schools began reopening with limited capacity in February 2021), the newly hired community school coordinator experienced difficulties getting to know teachers and families and introducing the community school strategy. The Bayfront assistant principal recounted the limitations placed on parents looking to access the building during the early days of the Covid closures by saying,

Obviously initially with lockdown, there was nothing. But I think as we've opened up, as the lockdown was lifted, there was also a reluctance to even come back to school because we would see parents come get laptops and whatnot but that was about it. To be honest, I would say we had about 50% active student participation during the pandemic. So 50% of our student body we lost track and we lost touch of due to not having the devices or not having internet. So communication was a problem. So even if we wanted to, we couldn't get out our programming to the majority of the community. I think that was a huge challenge for us.

Clearly, a new community school program predicated on creating an open and welcoming environment faced dramatic challenges due to the inability of students and families to access the building during these early days of Covid lockdowns. A Bayfront teacher talked about how even in May 2023, three years after the initial Covid closures, the specter of Covid and habits formed continued to impact parent participation. The teacher stated,

I think the big dip is parents not being in the building as much. So in previous years, like we, in Pre-K, we have thematic units every month. We have celebrations for those units every month. Parents usually come in for those celebrations every month. And because of protocols we're like, "Nope, no parent." Like you can only come in for these workshops. So I feel like maybe parents have kind of felt less welcomed. I have more kids who didn't go to daycare who didn't use the head start program last year, that separation anxiety of the parents is even worse. It's not even so much the kids not wanting to let go, it's the parents not wanting to let go.

The Covid closures posed a severe challenge to the new Bayfront community school coordinator as she sought to make connections in a new role where much of the programming needed to be delivered in a virtual format. Covid in general was a difficult time for individuals entering new jobs or positions, however being hired as a community school coordinator during this period was particularly challenging. The community school coordinator position by its nature is extremely relational, typically requires personal connections, and is best facilitated by individuals who have strong in-person connections with partners. A United Way staff member spoke to the challenges of making meaningful connections during this period of remote work by saying, "It's like starting a new job during the middle of the pandemic. It's like, how do you meet the other workers, employees, and the families you are supposed to be serving." The Bayfront assistant principal spoke about the challenges faced by the new coordinator by stating,

She had barely set foot in the building and had barely met with families when now she's forced to kind of do all that relationship building and getting to know the community from a computer screen, which clearly is not ideal.

Despite these Covid challenges, Bayfront engaged in limited but critical in-person activities, the most important of which was laptop distribution in April and May of 2020. By the start of the 2020-2021 school year, activities like diaper distribution and the food pantry program resumed, yet because of social distancing requirements, did not operate with the same frequency or scale as they had prior to the pandemic. Outside of disseminating much needed supplies and materials goods, most other aspects of community school programming at Bayfront, including parent meetings and family workshops, went dormant for nearly a year until schools reopened for a limited number of students during February 2021.

Challenges Around the Lack of a Deep Connection with Parents

Multiple interviewees surfaced the lack of a deep connection with parents as a challenge to implementation of the community school strategy. This fact was evident both in interview comments and in my own observations. Of the various stakeholder groups that were interviewed for this study, parents were far and away the hardest to get a hold of. Even with the help of the community school coordinator, who recommend parents to be interviewed and assisted with the scheduling, it took about two months to complete the interviews with the three parents. Some of this delay was due to logistical issues including interview timing that coincided with spring break and a parent whose scheduled interview was delayed for nearly two hours because of a doctor's appointment. However, I believe the challenge around accessing parents for the study was rooted in a lack of a deep, trusting connection. It is also significant to mention that of the three parents that the community school coordinator recommended, two were African American and one was Caucasian, despite working at a school with a nearly 30% Latinx population.

Several school staff mentioned facilitating deeper parent involvement as an area of growth in the upcoming year. The community school coordinator also acknowledged that working on greater family and school connections was a key area of focus for the upcoming school year,

Yeah, so my two biggest priorities that I've set for the upcoming year is developing the School Family Council (SFC), which is supposed to be implemented in every school in Baltimore City, which is kind of like that oversight committee for all of the other committees in the school. And then developing the PTA [Parent Teacher Association] led by parents. Like I said, I feel like if we have a dedicated group of parents who are dedicated to the school, we can help get more parents involved in different activities.

The School Family Council (SFC) requires all schools in Baltimore City to establish a unified group of parents, teachers, and school administrators to meet quarterly to focus on building and implementing a School Performance Plan (SPP). Each school is required to have a SPP that lays out baseline data for the school, performance targets in reading and mathematics, and an additional goal of the SFC's choosing (attendance, school climate, etc.). While required throughout the district, many schools, including Bayfront had not fully implemented the SFC structure in the way it was outlined in the district policy. This lack of fidelity to the policy is likely a function of too many district requirements, lax monitoring by the school system, the inability to achieve deep and consistent parent involvement, and a lack of investment in consistently tracking progress towards achieving SPP goals that many perceive as perfunctory.

Beyond lacking a School Family Council, Bayfront also did not have a Parent Teacher Association (PTA), which many interviewees mentioned. One of the parents I interviewed voiced her frustration around the lack of regular parent participation and advocated for a stronger community presence through a PTA. During her interview, she stated,

I seem to be one of the only parents. And there would be a lot of concerns about things that were going on in or around the school and the parents wouldn't be aware of things that were happening at the school or their voices weren't being heard. So I would have to kind of act like a middleman to relay information back and forth. And I told the community school coordinator, I was like, I really think that we could use a Parent Teacher Association to kind of either draw parents in or get messages out and so that was just something I'm really looking forward to seeing if that will blossom this year.

Despite the lack of a PTA at Bayfront, the community school coordinator had lofty ambitions for establishing one to aid with parent programming and communication. The community school coordinator felt that a functional PTA could alleviate some of the communication issues that had developed between school staff and families. She explained her ambitions for establishing a PTA and the promise of addressing communication concerns by saying,

We are working towards developing a PTA, a parent organization within the building to help with the vision. When we say community, we are trying to get the parents in the building to feel comfortable so that we can have input on all things that we're trying to do in the building, because sometimes they'll come back and say, "Well, I didn't know this or I didn't know that." So I feel like if we have that connection with the parents, then we can connect with the other parents and kind of get them in the building more.

Additionally, the community school coordinator had plans to establish a parent room as a home base for Bayfront parents in the upcoming year. This is a key feature in many community schools that enables parents to have a space to congregate, access resources (e.g., computers), and work with their peers to build community (Blank et al., 2003).

Challenges Serving a Latinx Population

One of the challenges identified by several Bayfront staff members was the lack of tools to effectively serve the Latinx population. The Latinx population at Bayfront comprised around 30% of the student body or around 110 students and their families. At a very practical level, Bayfront lacked bilingual staff members who could effectively communicate with the large and growing Latinx population at the school. Amongst the team that interfaced with the community most, including the community school coordinator, Judy Center coordinator, Judy Center Family Services Coordinator, and school principal, none were bilingual. In fact, very few of the staff were bilingual as evidenced by the following statement from a Bayfront teacher who said,

I definitely feel like since we are a community school, we definitely need to get someone bilingual in here. So one of our actual pre-K teachers this year, she used to be the ESOL para[educator] and she was basically the go-between for all the ESOL families in the building. And now that she's become a pre-K teacher, she's like, "I can't do that. That's too much," and so we're lacking in that. I mean we have 60 pre-K kids and 35 are ESOL²⁷ kids and most of them either didn't speak English at all coming in or their families still don't speak English. So like having a bilingual family liaison would be a good part of the community school offerings.

This phenomenon, in which minority staff members working within majority minority communities²⁸ are frequently called upon for specialized support, often to the point of exhaustion, was frequently cited in the literature base (Achinstein et al., 2010). Additional comments from Bayfront staff members referred to the lack of resources targeted at Latinx students and their

²⁷ In this statement, the teacher uses the term English as a Second Language (ESOL), however the quote uses this term to refer to the large Latinx population at Bayfront.

²⁸ Majority minority communities refer to communities where the majority of residents are Black, Latinx, or other people of color.

families. Staff members elevated the need for more programming focused on Latinx families including English language classes, translation services, and social activities like a Hispanic heritage night. The lack of activities and opportunities for the Latinx population negatively impacted the successful delivery of the community school strategy at Bayfront since the school did not address this key constituency's unique needs.

Challenges Associated with the Lack of Extended-Day Opportunities

One of the other challenges that surfaced during the data collection process centered on the lack of extended-day opportunities at Bayfront. While Bayfront had several after-school clubs, these were generally offered only once or twice a week, lacked a centralized enrollment mechanism, and were focused on a specific area of interest like chess, gardening, or a club targeted specifically for girls. This fractured after-school ecosystem runs contrary to what much of the community school research has surfaced as best practices within the arena of extended learning time (Kauerz & Coffman, 2013; Alliance for Early Success, 2013; Adams, 2019). At Bayfront, students might have access to after-school offerings based on a particular interest or connection to a teacher as opposed to having one strategic, robust, and integrated after-school program that was open and advertised to all families. This model proved difficult for many families that would have benefited from a system that extended later into the afternoon (most club offerings ended at 4:00 p.m.) and provided programming four or five days per week, to help address after-school childcare needs. The lack of a comprehensive after-school system was a particularly acute challenge due to the school's early dismissal time of 2:10 p.m. One Bayfront teacher address these challenges around the lack of a strategic after-school infrastructure by saying,

Yeah, I feel like we need more extracurriculars. I don't know if it's funding that's stopping it. I don't know if it's student interest that's stopping it. Parents are always looking for extracurriculars for the younger kids, but at the same time, technically they've been in school for six hours and it's a long day for them. But I know the older kids watch the younger kids too, so that could be a reason why we don't have as much participation. If the older kids must stay after school, so then do the younger kids. So that could be where the transition issue is.

Based on my interviews, it seems like the Bayfront community school program would benefit from a partnership with a comprehensive after-school provider that could serve multiple age cohorts and extend the school day to match the schedules of working parents.

Several stakeholders also made comments about the bias towards extended-day programming for younger students. Some of this was connected to the presence of the Judy Center, which implemented extended learning activities targeted toward younger learners. For example, the school's only summer program, Camp Curiosity, was targeted exclusively toward pre-kindergarten and kindergarten learners. A Bayfront teacher discussed this lack of enrichment opportunities for older learners by saying,

I definitely feel like we need more resources for our older students outside of academics, but I also know that that's really hard to get because it's usually teachers who have to stay afterwards to do those things where we could get like an outside coach to come in and do it. Just more for like the older kids, I feel like we've got a lot for the younger families, but not as much for the older kids.

Through the research study, I gathered input on the extended day opportunities at Bayfront from the perspective of adults, however I did not gather input directly from students about their

experiences and feelings of these opportunities. Future studies could explore what extended learning opportunities students find beneficial, and why they are beneficial. It could also surface what opportunities were lacking, for which age bands, and which subgroups, and what, from a student perspective, could be done to add scope and definition to the extended day opportunities currently being offered. Findings from this additional research on student perspectives on extended day program could inform both non-profit providers existing in the extended day ecosystem and community schools looking to expand their extended day offerings.

Challenges that are even too large for Community Schools to Address

One interesting category of challenges that surfaced during the interview process was challenges that were even too large for community schools to address. These challenges are so large and complex that even a highly functioning community school program, with all its coordination and resources, cannot surmount them. Despite its tremendous potential to impact a community, the community school strategy is not designed to alleviate societal inequities and injustices. Issues like unemployment, housing, and transportation are often so massive that there is little the community schools strategy can do, even on the fringes, to address these challenges. The community school coordinator at Bayfront identified two major issues that were exacerbated during Covid: housing instability and workforce development. She expressed a level of exasperation with how massive these challenges were and the limited tools that the community school strategy had available to assist parents in surmounting these challenges. The school attempted to address workforce development challenges through its partnerships with the United Way and City of Refuge, a local non-profit. Through its partnership with City of Refuge, Bayfront was working to,

Create a community space within the building where parents can come and be able to use the computer if they need to, to apply for jobs or to apply for benefits, and have someone there to be able to walk them through if they need to.

Despite efforts to connect families to a portal to submit job applications, the lack of a true workforce development and placement provider, coupled with Bayfront's geographic isolation in South Baltimore, made it difficult for families to find a clear path to employment. Similarly, while the community school coordinator worked in partnership with City of Refuge to get families energy assistance with their gas and electric bills, the lack of interventions to address problems with housing instability made the challenge of providing Bayfront families with consistent shelter very difficult to address. Despite the transformative effect that a well-functioning community schools can have on a neighborhood, the strategy is not designed, nor should it be expected to, resolve all societal ills.

Conclusion of the Findings Section

In this section of the dissertation, I examined results from the data collection process to answer my two overarching research questions. In analyzing interview transcripts, documents, observation reflections, and my field notes, I examined how the four pillars of community schools manifested in the implementation of the strategy at Bayfront. The findings section also enabled me to surface both successes and challenges in the implementation of the community school strategy. Major successes like the development of a welcoming environment, buy-in from Bayfront personnel to the strategy, the responsiveness of the community school strategy to students and families, and the robust ramp-up in programs and services to provide much needed support for the community at Bayfront, were counterbalanced by six important challenges that emerged in the

data set including challenges around communication, challenges posed by the Covid school closures, challenges associated with the lack of a deep connection with parents, challenges serving a Latinx population, challenges associated with the lack of extended-day opportunities for students, and challenges that are even too large for the community school strategy to address. In the next section of the dissertation, I will discuss the findings from this case study in relation to research conducted on both community schools and education policy implementation.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

This chapter begins with a discussion of major findings as I analyze them in light of the prior literature on policy implementation and community schools. In this section of the dissertation, I examined the four major findings that emerged from my case study of Bayfront Elementary. These four findings were surfaced by multiple participants across the various stakeholder groups and reflect important understandings that emerged from the exploration of community school implementation at Bayfront. The first major finding in this study elevates the importance of a strong school leadership team, particularly the school principal and community school coordinator, as key contributors to the successful implementation of the community school strategy. The second major finding elevates the critical role that the lead agency, in this case, the United Way, played in managing, facilitating, and supporting the community school strategy. These first two findings contributed to the successful implementation of the community school strategy at Bayfront.

In contrast, the third and fourth findings are connected to challenges that interfered with the successful implementation of the strategy. The third main finding explores the siloed structure at Bayfront Elementary, which was characterized by a tangible divide between the school's academic and community functions. This tangible divide was seen in teachers not fully understanding the robust scope of services provided to families as part of the community school strategy and similarly in the community school coordinator lacking clarity around the full scope of academic services and interventions available to support struggling students. Finally, the fourth major finding explores how the community school strategy at Bayfront Elementary School remained very transactional, with a unidirectional flow of resources and supports from the school

to families. While Bayfront families partook in many of the giveaway programs (e.g. the food pantry and diaper giveaways) there was a need for additional opportunities for sustained and meaningful parent leadership, voice, and involvement through structures like a parent teacher association (PTA) or school family council (SFC).

Throughout this section, I discuss each of these four major findings and integrate these findings with previous community school research. Additionally, I examine the four major findings utilizing Honig's (2006) framework for contemporary policy implementation with an explicit focus on how people, policy, and places presented in this study.

In the final portion of the discussion section, I identify this study's contributions to the research base. I will also include implications for practice and suggestions for future research. The chapter will conclude with an overview of limitations of the study and a few closing thoughts.

Finding One: The Critical Role of People in the Successful Implementation of the Community School Strategy

Multiple research studies argue that a strong school leadership team is necessary for successful implementation of the community school strategy (Richardson, 2009; Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, 2016, McMahon et al., 2000). In particular, the principal and community school coordinator are pivotal actors since they establish and support a vision that is community-centered, directly engage in the work of administrating the community school strategy, and interface with community partners that help deliver community-directed services (Bartlett & Freeze, 2018; Sanders, 2018). As explored in the findings section, these community school leaders also facilitate greater buy-in from core personnel including teachers, community partners, school staff, and parents. At Bayfront, other key personnel also played important leadership roles, including the Judy Center coordinator, school secretary, community school manager with the United Way, and

key teachers who were involved in facilitating the community school strategy. The importance of other key personnel coincides with other policy implementation studies (Honig, 2006) that have elevated the important role of ancillary actors in impacting implementation. In contrast to other community school studies, the leadership team at Bayfront was more expansive than that of typical community schools (Bartlett & Freeze, 2018; Sanders, 2018; McMahon et al., 2000). The size of the Bayfront team is likely due to the schools partnerships with the United Way as a lead agent and the Judy Center program, which provided community-school-adjacent services to early learners.

The School Principal

At Bayfront Elementary, all participants acknowledged the principal's critical role. The principal contributed to the successful implementation of the community school strategy on a multitude of fronts, including setting forth a vision in which the school, as a community hub, was at the center. He established a framework in which all staff were oriented toward welcoming parents and partners at all times, which was articulated in the school vision and modeled by the school principal through actions like knowing the names of all students and many of the parents, being in front of the building each day at opening and dismissal, conducting daily video announcements that centered on kindness, and being outwardly open and welcoming to all Bayfront parents who entered the building. The school principal's explicit actions permeated throughout the entirety of the staff and established the important preconditions for the foundation of a successful community school program. Similar to findings from Fehrer & Leos-Urbel (2016), the principal's approach to community school implementation follows a roadmap that emphasizes the need to share the school vision, create and nurture relationships with people and organizations,

understand and navigate formal and informal power relationships, and acquire the resources required to fuel a proposed vision.

The principal's orientation toward the community and welcoming of families into the school was one of his multiple strengths as a leader. However, there were other characteristics of the principal leadership's style that were critical for the successful implementation of the community school strategy. There was clear evidence that the principal provided ample support to his teachers and the community school coordinator. This support came in the form of not getting in the way of innovations while also providing resources such as authority, funding, and thought partnership to support execution of the community school strategy. This orientation toward empowered leadership echoes many of the elements of reform flexibility surfaced by Datnow and colleagues (2002). By providing a space for the community school coordinator to innovate and take ownership of the community school program, the Bayfront principal avoided the programmatic rigidity that often cripples new reforms. The reform flexibility (Datnow, et al., 2002) that was applied at Bayfront enabled a community school strategy that was reflective of the needs and assets of the community, and yielded high levels of buy-in from ground-level actors who took great ownership of the strategy.

The Community School Coordinator

As another important member of the leadership team, the community school coordinator also fulfilled critical roles for the successful implementation of the community school strategy (Blank et al., 2010). The four key responsibilities for a community school coordinator outlined by the National Center for Community Schools (2019) include: 1) joint planning with school staff; 2) aligning supports and services to strengthen the core instructional program; 3) recruiting,

managing, and coordinating partnerships; and 4) connecting families and community members with the appropriate resources. The Bayfront community school coordinator fulfilled all four of these responsibilities. She engaged in joint planning with school staff and other stakeholders (responsibility one), participated in monthly planning meetings with other United Way community school coordinators, and engaged in a series of informal meetings with the “community team” at Bayfront (comprised of the community school coordinator, Judy Center coordinator, and school secretary). Similar to other research studies on community schools, findings from this study demonstrated that community school coordinators who maintain a strong connection with the school principal and other key stakeholders have the potential to facilitate transformational experiences for students and their families (Sanders et al., 2019, Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, 2016; Oakes et al., 2017). These transformational experiences are made possible by creating spaces to discuss areas of need for students and families, cultivating partners to address those needs, and establishing systems and processes to deliver academic offerings and other community-based support.

Study participants also shared how the community school coordinator aligned supports and services to strengthen the school’s core instructional program (responsibility two, National Center for Community Schools, 2019). Many of these integrated student supports, including connections to tutoring providers, health programming like the mobile dentist and Vision for Baltimore, and the facilitation of family learning nights were outlined under pillar one of the findings section. This variety of partnerships helped to strengthen the core instructional program at Bayfront by providing additional academic support to students, utilizing key performance data to identify students who were struggling and match them with appropriate resources, and equipping families with wrap-around supports to mitigate obstacles to student learning.

The community school coordinator was also responsible for recruiting, managing, and coordinating partnerships (responsibility three, National Center for Community Schools, 2019) to address the variety of identified needs within the community. The community school coordinator relied on results from the bi-annual needs assessment and ongoing interactions with families to identify pervasive community needs. This data around community need was parlayed into numerous community partnerships to addressing student and family needs. By using the data gathered during the needs assessment process, the community school coordinator was able to form partnerships with a variety of organizations/institutions (e.g., tutoring providers, mental health entities, and after-school clubs). The community school coordinator also applied elements of the collaborative leadership practices that are seminal to pillar four in order to manage and coordinate the various partnership programs. Effective coordination of community school partners requires open communication, outlining expectations and parameters, and handling key elements around program delivery like recruiting students and families, marketing the program, scheduling events, coordinating space, and evaluating program impact.

The NCCS (2019) elevated connecting families and community members with resources (responsibility four) as another important responsibility for community school coordinators. The community school coordinator at Bayfront found partnership programs that benefitted the larger community, while also providing personalized case management support to families in need. Similar to other research conducted on the role of community school coordinators (Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, 2016), I found that a significant portion of the Bayfront community school coordinator's daily role focused on ensuring that families' basic needs were met through the delivery of individual case management support. Intensive case management is extremely time consuming and requires great diligence as coordinators must diagnosis the specific needs of each family and

connect them to the best fitting resource. As articulated in the findings section, case management support can be challenging as families face systemic issues like housing instability or lack of employment, which are often too large for even an effective community school program to address.

A time study conducted by Mayger and Hochbein (2019) found that for participating community school coordinators, two-thirds of their time was occupied with tasks aligned with the four priorities identified by the National Center for Community Schools (2019). While this case study of community school implementation at Bayfront was not connected to a similar time study, frequency data from the interviews provides some insight into how the coordinator's time was allocated. The largest portion of her time was dedicated to recruiting, managing, and coordinating the various partnerships at Bayfront, as well as connecting families and community members with the appropriate resources. The Mayger and Hochbein (2019) study also proposed a fifth category, consisting of managerial and logistical tasks that could occupy up to one-third of each coordinator's time. The community school coordinator at Bayfront reported that the support provided by the United Way made the logistical and paperwork burdens manageable. The United Way established a collaborative structure that allowed community school coordinators across their five partner schools to work together to vet and facilitate partnerships, share ideas and resources, and share reminders about upcoming paperwork submissions and deadlines. This collaborative structure is explored further in a later portion of the discussion section, as it connects to the alleviation of burdensome paperwork requirements surfaced by Mayger and Hochbein (2019).

Another important role of the community school coordinator is serving as a boundary spanner. An effective community school coordinator must navigate relationships with diverse stakeholder groups to build coalitions around a common cause (Mayger & Hochbein, 2019). This can be challenging due to the diversity of stakeholder groups, which include parents, students,

teachers, administrators, and community partners. Furthermore, these diverse stakeholder groups may maintain different and conflicting perspectives. For example, at Bayfront, there was tension around after-school offerings, with parents wanting a more comprehensive and consistent regiment of after-school care provided four to five days each week. Teachers who oversaw after-school activities, however, preferred to stay late only one or two days per week to facilitate programming. A boundary-spanning role of the community school coordinator was to interact with both groups to help them understand the challenges and attempt to broker a compromise, or at least, develop some common understanding about why the current system existed.

The Involvement of Other Key Actors

Beyond the school principal and community school coordinator, there were other actors at the school whose leadership roles were important for the successful implementation of the new community school program. At Bayfront, other important school personnel who influenced implementation included the school secretary, the United Way community school manager, and the Judy Center coordinator. In their interviews, multiple teachers and parents referenced the Judy Center coordinator; school leadership mentioned the support provided by the United Way through the community school manager; and multiple school staff referenced the school secretary.

During my multiple visits to Bayfront, it was apparent how critical the secretary was to the school's day-to-day functioning and the parent- and community-facing aspects of the schooling experience. The key role of multiple, ancillary actors in policy implementation conforms to what is reported in the contemporary policy implementation literature. According to Honig (2016), there is growing acknowledgement that a litany of individuals, many of whom are not named as formal targets in policy designs, can have profound influence on the quality and scope of

implementation. This is a critical area for future research on the community school strategy since all previous studies focused primarily on the principal and community school coordinator as the formal actors in strategy implementation. Subsequent studies should consider exploring the network of contributors that lead to successful community school implementation, including partners, lead agents, teachers, and parents.

During the interview process, an informal “community team” including the community school coordinator, Judy Center coordinator, and school secretary emerged as crucial players in discussing potential partnerships, planning community events, coordinating upcoming workshops, and undertaking the mundane, yet important tasks required to bring programming to life. While not as much formal authority was possessed by the “community team” as the more formalized leadership team (the principal, two assistant principals, and academic coach), this group was bestowed a tremendous amount of informal authority (Heifetz, 1994) around the community school work at Bayfront. Some of the primary responsibilities of the “community team” included identifying partners that supported the community school provision of services, coordinating events, identifying the appropriate times and spaces for programming to take place, marketing opportunities to families, and being present during activities to monitor and adjust when needed. For example, the secretary discussed informally brainstorming ideas for new community programming to fill service gaps within the school. The Judy Center coordinator also relied on the school secretary and community school coordinator’s insights to think through marketing strategies for Judy Center events through ClassDojo, fliers, school announcements, or word-of-mouth.

Several “community team” conversations led to new community school programming, such as a special week to recognize parents and caregivers through events like muffins for moms

and donuts for dads. The “community team” was typically responsible for planning, vetting, and executing school activities and workshops. The formation of this small subgroup with decision-making authority echoes research that has emerged around the importance of people in implementation (Honig, 2006). In contemporary policy implementation studies, groups are no longer seen as monolithic and defined by their professional affiliations (e.g., teachers, central office administrators, etc.); instead, individuals are viewed as having unique interests, beliefs, values, ideas, knowledge, and orientations that are both shaped by and help to shape implementation (Honig, 2006). Honig argues that a modern exploration of people warrants a deeper probe into aligned sub-groups. In the “community team” example, they were aligned by common interests, including a focus on work that is more community-facing, and all worked in the same physical area with relative proximity to the main office. The finding is reminiscent of the informal teacher groups that developed at Stadele Elementary (Coburn & Stein, 2006), which served as powerful mechanisms for interpreting the policy being implemented, while being unified by social connections and not necessarily role or position.

Many teachers and parents referenced the Bayfront Judy Center coordinator as an important contributor to the success of community school implementation at Bayfront. In the eyes of many of interview respondents, the Judy Center was an extension of Bayfront’s community school approach, while the Judy Center engaged in the same type of activities around case management, family programming, and service provision, but targeted the birth to age five demographic. The community team talked about many of these programs “piggybacking” off of one another. For example, a Judy Center diaper giveaway provided a space for word-of-mouth marketing about the family literacy night and other community school events. Conversely, parent

participation in the food pantry would provide a place to inform families about Judy Center offerings like the early childhood playgroups or Head Start program.

Finding Two: The Importance of the United Way as a Lead Agent

A second major finding in my research on community school implementation at Bayfront centered on the key role that the United Way played as an intermediary partner/lead agent. In Baltimore's community school context, a lead agent is an organization that the school system contracts to support and administer the community school strategy at a single school or set of schools. The lead agency enters into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the school system, outlining the expectations and parameters of each partner and the allocating grant dollars to implement community school programming.

In some school districts, the onus for hiring coordinators, conducting an initial needs assessment, identifying community partners, and facilitating the community school strategy falls to local administrators, with intermediary partners playing a minimal role in implementation (Oakes et al., 2017; Blank et al., 2003). In contrast, in Baltimore City Public Schools, the district or third-party lead agents provide a more regimented structure for support. At Bayfront, the United Way of Central Maryland, a large local non-profit organization, took on the role of lead agency. As a lead agency, the United Way was responsible for hiring, supervising, and evaluating all coordinators at their designated community schools. The lead agency also provides programmatic support by deploying additional staff when needed, supporting with marketing and grant writing, assisting with strategy and program implementation, and being one of several entities²⁹ that provides professional development support to each coordinator. As lead agent, the United Way

²⁹ The Family League or school system may provide other professional development support to community school coordinators in Baltimore.

also connected Bayfront with partners like City of Refuge, Healthcare Access Maryland, and the United Way On-Track for Success program.

In contrast to previous research that identified potential tensions between lead agencies and school principals over community school coordinators' roles and responsibilities (Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, 2016), at Bayfront, the relationship between lead agency and school personnel was very supportive and amicable. Some of this had to do with the Bayfront principal's hand-off approach to management. Additionally, the principal and the United Way had an existing relationship through several years of partnership on the On-Track for Success program. Because of this established trust, Bayfront did not experience the competing directives that often mire other relationships between school administrators and lead agents.

The United Way provided oversight, professional development, and support to the community school coordinator, which allowed the school principal to stay somewhat removed from day-to-day operations. The United Way provided professional support through a variety of mechanisms including workshops, quarterly check-in meetings with the principal, and a structure of peer support with its network of five community school coordinators. As Honig (2006) argues, a close connection between organizations that provide oversight and support for site-level implementers provided alignment between policymakers and implementers. When this tight alignment exists, there is a higher propensity for supports crafted around actual project needs as opposed to implementation bounded by either artificial constraints or unrealistic expectations.

One of the key dynamics that powered the partnership between Bayfront and the United Way was the long-lasting, trusting relationship that had developed over the span of many years. The school principal trusted not only the community school coordinator, but also the United Way as a support mechanism, allowing him to embrace his philosophy of empowered leadership and

avoid being mired in day-to-day facilitation. The school principal, Bayfront community school coordinator, and United Way community schools manager met quarterly to assess strategy efficacy and make adjustments that lead to successful implementation of the community school strategy. This regular collaboration is an excellent example of pillar four, collaborative leadership practices. It is a testament to the collaborative efforts of the entire team at Bayfront that the strategy's complex elements were implemented relatively seamlessly despite the short implementation timeline.

The United Way also served as a vehicle for peer support. One of the United Way's community school coordinators served as a coordinator at a nearby high school as well as a manager for other United Way coordinators. The United Way's management structure provided ample space for peer interactions that helped the group of community school coordinators co-plan, problem solve, and provide feedback on strategy implementation. This structure for consistent collaboration, problem solving, and co-planning helped to ensure the coordinators were deeply connected as trusted collaborators. Much of the implementation research on teacher collaboration and peer support has found that for novice teachers, the most substantial changes to teacher practice came from instances where colleague support was facilitated by a trusted provider with deep content knowledge (Coburn & Russell, 2008). Coburn and Stein (2006) found that when facing implementation challenges, teachers frequently turned to their peers for support and leaned heavily into social networks to improve teacher practice. Further studies on teacher collaboration elevated the importance of teaching as a collaborative endeavor embedded within a broader social and organizational context (Honig, 2006). This research also found that the social bonds developed between teachers that frequently collaborated were substantially stronger. In the structure established by the United Way, community school coordinators met on a weekly basis to discuss

problems, provide updates on successes and challenges, and plan upcoming collaborative endeavors.

While many of the previous implementation studies have focused on the impact of connections amongst teachers, these dynamics around policy implementation were also apparent in examining community school implementation at Bayfront. On several occasions, the Bayfront coordinator reiterated the value she placed on feedback and insights from her peer coordinators, often privileging their reflections over the formalized policy prescriptions coming from the school district or the Family League. The coordinator also relied heavily on the community school manager as both a peer and a veteran coordinator with many years of experience. The United Way's collaborative structure served as a key contribution in its role as intermediary. This structure helped the coordinator at Bayfront collaboratively plan events, identify key partners, keep track of upcoming reporting deadlines, and solve challenges. Research has surfaced the key role that these professional relationships play in interpreting and implementing policy prescriptions (Little, 2003; Smylie & Hart, 1999).

Finding Three: A Siloed Community Schools Structure, the Divide Between Academic and Community Functions

A third major finding from this study was the existence of a distinct divide between the school's academic functions and its community-oriented programming. This siloed structure represented a division point between teachers, who had a robust focus on the curriculum, academic interventions, and tutoring supports, while the community team was more focused on parent workshops, partner coordination, and neighborhood events. A number of interviewees referenced teachers who would connect parents to the community school coordinator when parents identified

resource needs. This warm handoff was typical, since the community school coordinator possessed the most knowledge of the resources available and how to best facilitate a connection to meet the outstanding need. However, despite these clearly delineated roles, teachers generally lacked awareness of the slate of available community programs.

This challenge was surfaced previously in the findings section as an example of the communication struggles at Bayfront. While there were challenges with consistently delivering information using a forum that was widely accessible by staff, another challenge was the lack of comprehensive knowledge of the community school offerings. During the interview process, teachers expressed the desire for training on the amalgam of community school offerings available or access to a written guide on what services could be offered to Bayfront parents. This dynamic reflecting the lack of knowledge outside of their designated “silo” was also true in reverse, where the community school coordinator was aware of a school-wide academic intervention program, but could not explain any of the details including how students were selected, who would be providing the academic support, and what types of academic interventions would be provided.

It is important to note that this siloed nature of community schools, while not articulated in the general model or in the literature, is regular practice within the field, particularly for schools that are early in the implementation process. Much of this is predictable based on school-level staff’s overwhelming workload around classroom instruction, grading, classroom management, academic interventions, etc., which may preclude teachers from full awareness of the community school program. Similarly, community school coordinators who specialize in family interactions, developing and nurturing partnerships, and providing case management support, often defer to the academic staff when faced with questions about student learning.

As a key figure responsible for both the academic and community functions of the school, the principal often straddles the demands of these two silos of the school experience. Based on my interactions at Bayfront, there could be greater awareness and communication between the academic and community silos at the school, which may aid in disseminating resources to families or forming community school partnerships. The school principal could play a critical role in this process, given their unique vantage point on how the multiple “puzzle pieces” fit together to support students, teachers, families, and community members.

Finding Four: Transactional Community Schools and a Unidirectional Flow of Resources and Support

A fourth and final major finding in this case study of community school implementation at Bayfront focuses on a transactional approach to the community school strategy, typified by a unidirectional flow of resources and support from school personnel to families. In theory, the community school strategy is intended to have a multi-directional flow of support, with families partaking in programming and resource dissemination, as well as contributing time, energy, and talents to benefit the school community (Blank et al., 2003). However, in many cases, community schools focus primarily on disseminating resources and knowledge to the community without this reciprocation from community members. This is a common challenge faced by many community schools and one that I suspect is becoming more common with the rapid expansion of the strategy. More recent conceptions of the community school model seem to deemphasize the model’s reciprocal nature. This change from the original theory of community school, which focuses not only on “community needs,” but also on “community assets” is an emerging challenge within the field and one that demands increased research and scrutiny.

This research study found that Bayfront parents engaged in many of the school's community school offerings, such as the food pantry, Judy Center diaper giveaways, clothes pantry, or workshops on financial literacy, credit recovery, or homeownership. These programs are typical of the community school model, where community agencies and partners are hosted on site, providing children and families with access to programs in health, social services, and youth development (Ferrara & Gomez, 2014, Min et al., 2017). As stated in the findings section, Bayfront accumulated an impressive scale and scope of resources during its first four years of strategy implementation. Much of this success is a testament to the principal's leadership, the community school coordinator's hard work and hustle, and the United Way's resource connections and support. While there was a good deal of engagement with families, most of these interactions were one-directional, with parents benefiting from the services provided, but not necessarily being asked or encouraged to devote their time and talents to benefit the community.

A common challenge for community schools, particularly in early stages of development, is establishing a robust service delivery system while also maintaining a strong culture of parent contributions, voice, and leadership. Oppenheim (1999) describes this need to focus on capacity building within a community instead of a simple service provision approach. Oppenheim reported that when both structures are integrated, families benefit from services while growing their investment with school personnel and the academic program. Voyles (2012) reinforced this concept through his finding that increased parent investment creates a school-family relationship that is more productive and sustainable since it develops parent capacity rather than maintaining the dependency that characterizes continuous receipt of services.

In their studies of reform implementation, Century and Levy (2002, 2004) identify three stages that schools progress through toward reform sustainability: establishment, maturation, and

evolution. The establishment phase targets the introduction of the reform and consolidation around core principles. The maturation phase is characterized by the relative stability of reform implementation. Finally, the evolution stage is focused on growth and improvement.

When community school implementation at Bayfront was in its early years, there was such rapid growth under the leadership of the school principal and the guidance and coordination of community school coordinator that implementation likely falls somewhere between the maturation and evolution phases. Bayfront quickly moved beyond the establishment phase with general acceptance, knowledge, and support by the staff of the community school strategy. There was evidence of reform implementation with a robust slate of partners and the establishment of an open and welcoming environment for families. In a few short years, Bayfront had captured the essence of what Dryfoos (1995, 2005) had envisioned in her full-service community school model, developing into a neighborhood hub where schools were the centerpiece of community programming and support services.

However, while there was evidence that Bayfront community school implementation met requisites of the establishment and maturation phases of Century and Levy's (2002, 2004) model, there was clear need for more robust, multi-directional engagement with families within the final evolution phase. Two focus areas that emerged in the data collection process that are important for Bayfront's continued growth and expansion are more meaningful engagement with parents through the PTA (or some other formalized structure) and more expansive programming for Latinx families. Recent studies of education policy implementation have acknowledged the importance of families and communities within school, resulting in more policies directed at school-community partnership. Yet frequently, the lack of cross-systems knowledge of policymakers has limited their ability to provide what communities need (Honig, 2006). In the case of Bayfront, a

lack of knowledge and concerted effort around how to actively engage parents in leadership opportunities was lacking but was also a focal point for programming in the upcoming school year.

Lack of Opportunities for Parent Leadership

Despite having elevated levels of community engagement through the introduction of the community school program, engagement at Bayfront was much more transactional in nature than what is typical of fully matured community school programs. According to Blank et al. (2003), community schools work to elevate voice in a variety of meaningful ways by empowering parents with opportunities to hold decision-making roles and provide input on programming. This emphasis on parent voice is further reinforced in the literature, with a focus on multi-stakeholder partnerships where teachers, families, school administrators, community members, and in some cases, students, work in concert to develop a partnership plan and put structures in place for implementation, including securing resources and evaluating the efficacy of activities (Epstein et al., 2009; Montoya-Avila et al., 2018). Many of these structures were still in development at Bayfront, and school staff acknowledged these areas as a critical next step in the evolution of the community school strategy. The community school coordinator spoke explicitly about the need to facilitate deeper, more meaningful outreach to families in the upcoming year and had already engaged in deep thinking around the establishment of a more robust parent room, coordination of a Bayfront PTA, and construction of a School Family Council (SFC).

The School Family Council (SFC) is one of two typical structures to elevate parent voice in Baltimore City schools. The SFC is typically composed of parents, teachers, school administrators, and community members who are focused on monitoring school goals articulated in the school performance plan (SPP). The SFC exists separate and apart from the PTA, which has

traditionally been a parent-led group that helps to plan family events and motivate more robust involvement from parents. Multiple studies have elevated the importance of parent involvement in school as critical to the cognitive, emotional, and physical health of both students and the community at large (Galindo et al., 2017). Elevated levels of parent voice, leadership, and contributions through donations of time, energy, and talent are important aspects of more mature implementation of the community school strategy.

Interestingly, while there was a lack of structure for incorporating parent voices fully into the community school strategy at Bayfront, many staff voiced an underlying frustration at the lack of parent involvement and attendance at school events. Several staff members commented on the lack of parent involvement in events that they would consider a “low lift,” such as holiday giveaways or gift basket distributions. Researchers have explored this seeming disconnect between parent and school staff expectations, finding that it is common for teachers to gauge successful parental involvement through metrics like regular classroom volunteerism and improvements in student behavior. Conversely, parents often frame positive teacher-parent collaborations around regular communication on home assignments and communication on the academic material being covered (Voyles, 2012). These differing understandings of what constitutes successful school-parent collaborations frequently leads to frustrations and missed opportunities between the two constituent groups.

In his research on reform sustainability, Fullan et al. (2004) identified the creation of coalitions as an important driver of reform sustainability. Furthermore, Sanders (2012) found that coalition development strengthens reform stability by building the capacity of those required to understand and implement the reform while subsequently creating a learning culture to support the reform. Establishing structures for coalition building amongst parents, teachers, community

partners, and school administrators could be a helpful next step in the implementation of the community school strategy at Bayfront and would aid in solidifying the reform. Parents, teachers, and school administrators also all commented on the need for a structure to get more parents invested and involved. Fortunately, this next step of incorporating more parent voice through the installation of a PTA was at the top of the community school coordinator's docket of initiatives for the upcoming year. Incorporating greater parent voice would help to facilitate the coalition building addressed by Fullan et al. (2004) and Sanders (2012) that could motivate deeper commitment and longevity of the community school reform.

Lack of Input and Involvement from Latinx Families

One additional and glaring challenge associated with community school implementation at Bayfront was the lack of deep involvement and outreach to Latinx families. Multiple interviewees referenced this challenge, which was reinforced through my observations at the school. For example, in a school where 26% of the population identifies as Latinx and 22% qualify for ESOL services, not a single member of the school administration or community team (secretary, community school coordinator, and Judy Center coordinator) was bilingual. The school's teachers also referenced this lack of targeted support for this important and growing population of the school and a need for additional resources to support Latinx families and students. Of the three parents who were recommended to be interviewed for this study, two were Black, one was White, despite Hispanic families representing more than a quarter of the Bayfront population.

These challenges around racial and ethnic divides reinforce previous research conducted on community schools in Baltimore by Galindo and colleagues (2017). In their study of social capital in community schools, tensions surfaced between various ethnic groups around the scarcity

of resources, including time with the school principal, limited programmatic dollars, and constraints on time needed to implement the community school strategy. The difficult tradeoffs that had to be made led to some parent voices being elevated over others, resulting in fissures amongst the school community. This type of dynamic seemed to be present at Bayfront, where outreach seemed to be focused on English-speaking, non-Latinx families where a language barrier was not present. Challenges around race and class differences are deeply anchored in the education literature, which has found that trust-building and communication between parents and teachers are made more difficult with social class and cultural differences (Baker et al., 2016; Montoya-Ávila et al., 2018). This divide is particularly evident among minority parents where language is a barrier. Often, minority parents facing this type of power imbalance within the education setting will defer to the instructional staff's expertise on decision-making due to a perceived lack of knowledge around data, practice, and terminology (Keith, 1996).

Connections between the Main Findings and the Conceptual Framework

For this case study of community school implementation, I utilized the contemporary policy implementation framework established by Meredith Honig (2006) as the conceptual frame with which to analyze program implementation. Honig explores how contemporary education policy implementation differs from previous examinations of implementation by citing 1) the development of new policy designs, often characterized with increasing complexity; and 2) the need for greater attention on the people, policy, and places that shape policy implementation (Honig, 2006). This framework provides an optimal lens with which to examine a complex policy reform like community schools, which necessitates changes in the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of ground-level implementers (Coburn, 2003; Cohen & Ball, 1990; Elmore, 1996). In the space

below, I intend to examine how people, policy, and place, are all present within this case study of community school implementation at Bayfront. I will also explore how and why the interplay between these various dimensions influence implementation. The resulting analysis will seek to examine how policies, people, and places combine and interact to influence implementation, however, as stated by Honig (2006), this analysis is conducted not to seek universal truths, as was characteristic in previous explorations of policy implementation, but rather to accumulate knowledge about the contingencies that impact implementation in this particular case study.

Prior to landing on Honig's (2006) contemporary implementation framework as one of the key conceptual lenses for the exploration of this study, I examined several other frameworks including ecological systems theory, social capital theory, and boundary-spanning leadership. Since the research questions examined successes and challenges with the strategy at Bayfront, I decided to focus on policy implementation as a key lens for conducting this study. Further exploration of Honig's contemporary policy implementation framework and its focus on elaborate policy prescriptions and its centering of people, policy, and places as being critical implementation foci, elevated it as an optimal lens for the examination of community school strategy implementation at Bayfront.

Of the three characteristics of contemporary implementation studies, people showed up most prominently in this case study of community school implementation at Bayfront. Throughout the interview process, interviewees consistently identified the school principal and community school coordinator as key figures in implementation. Interviewees rarely referenced policy, unless it was in response to a specific question. Even when policy was referenced, there was a lack of clarity around policy origins and how the comprehensive *Blueprint* legislation fit together. The final policy implementation characteristic addressed in the Honig framework, place, was lightly

addressed throughout the case study. There were a few comments associated with South Baltimore, the larger community in which Bayfront was situated. As it relates to place, I will explain how Baltimore City's long standing connection to the community school strategy, including eight years of lessons learned since the initial implementation of the community school strategy in 2012, helped to inform implementation of the strategy at Bayfront.

The frequent references to people was in alignment with community school research that elevated the principal and community school coordinator as pivotal actors (Bartlett & Freeze, 2018; Sanders, 2018). Alongside the principal and community school coordinator, the Judy Center coordinator and the school secretary were also frequently referenced as important leaders in the implementation process. It is no surprise that the impact of people was featured prominently in this case study, since human actors and relationships are critical features in much of the research on policy implementation, public education, and community schools (Bartlett & Freeze, 2018; Honig, 2006; Weatherly & Lipsky, 1977).

In many public schools, human actors have tremendous influence on how policy gets implemented. In this case study, the principal helped advance the goals of the community school strategy while developing the conditions for a warm and welcoming environment. The principal was also instrumental in establishing an orientation in which family support was aligned with the school's overarching goals. Coupled with the support and expertise provided by the United Way, he equipped his staff with the autonomy and resources (including time, space, money, and connections) to successfully actualize the community school strategy at Bayfront. Outside of the school principal and community school coordinator, the emergence of lesser known, but incredibly important staff members, like the school secretary and the Judy Center coordinator, also proved prominent in the case study. This corresponds with the findings from Honig, et al. (2001) that have

shown that ancillary actors, despite not being named as formal targets in policy designs, both participate and have profound influence on the quality and scope of implementation.

The second leg of Honig's education implementation stool is the concept of policy. In this case study, the new community school policy was part of a much more robust package of education reforms under the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future*, passed by the Maryland state legislature in 2021. The *Blueprint* fits squarely with Honig's (2006) characterization that contemporary policy prescriptions have grown increasingly complex and multi-faceted. Composed of five pillars that include 1) early childhood education, 2) high quality and diverse teachers and leaders, 3) college and career readiness, 4) more resources for students to be successful, and 5) governance and accountability, the *Blueprint* is the largest and most comprehensive education reform package to be introduced in Maryland. The expansion of community schools is connected to pillar four of the *Blueprint*, focused on more resources for students to be successful.

It is important to note a few observations from the implementation literature that are relevant to this community school expansion. First, statewide policies encompass a much larger scope and therefore require a different degree of engagement when compared to those operating in a limited number of schools (Hess, 2002). Additionally, policy prescriptions like the *Blueprint*, which cover a 10-year time horizon, evoke different implementation consequences than policies focused on a truncated period (Hess, 2002). Finally, policies like community school expansion that require more adaptive changes involving staff relationships with parents and deep engagement with community partners pose different implementation challenges than more technical changes like modifications in course schedules or seating arrangements (Heifetz, 1994). These adaptive challenges frequently make comprehensive, people-driven reforms like community school implementation difficult to institute with fidelity and effectiveness.

It is important to examine the critical interplay between people and policy when exploring implementation of educational initiatives like community schools. In the community school context, strictly tailored policy could delineate the qualifications of community school coordinators, processes for hiring and recruiting coordinators, and processes to manage, evaluate, and support coordinators. This would, theoretically, lead to more uniform standards across schools and districts. The *Blueprint* however opted to remain non-prescriptive about many of the qualifications and evaluation and support mechanisms connected to coordinators, relying on school districts to design policies that best connected to their local context. The *Blueprint* legislation instead established broad parameters, citing the need for a community school coordinator in all concentrated poverty schools, a designated amount of funding for programming, the requirement for a regularly conducted needs assessment, and a listing of possible supports (e.g. a food pantry or GED classes) that could be provided through the community school strategy. Beyond these broad policy requirements, each school district was mandated to submit a local implementation plan to be reviewed and approved annually by the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB), the entity charged with oversight of the *Blueprint*. This policy approach provides greater flexibility to local education agencies around staffing, training, managing, and supporting coordinators, but potentially creates high variability around the qualifications and demands of coordinators based on the requirements of each jurisdiction. Of the various elements articulated in the Honig (2006) framework, references to place were the least mentioned in this research study. This is most likely because the case study was conducted at just one location as opposed to across multiple sites. In previous research studies that used the Honig education policy implementation framework, policy was enacted across an entire district, as was

the case, for example, of studies conducted on the implementation of literacy strategies across several schools (Honig, 2006; Coburn & Stein, 2006; Little, 2003; Smylie & Hart, 1999).

While it was not acknowledged frequently by interview respondents, place did serve a critical role in the implementation of the community school strategy at Bayfront. Baltimore City, as one of the longest-running implementers of community schools throughout the state, beginning its strategy implementation in 2012, had accumulated eight years of “lessons learned” prior to implementation at Bayfront. The informal roadmap that had been developed, accumulated by previous coordinators throughout the course of nearly a decade of implementation, laid the groundwork for the Bayfront coordinator to quickly and successfully ramp-up community school offerings. Practical information like which non-profits were equipped to provide diapers, workforce training, or mental health support, and which agencies could aid with utility shutoffs or provide childcare vouchers, were more easily accessible due to the pathway blazed by previous Baltimore City coordinators. The lack of clear models of successful community school implementation in neighboring counties has undoubtedly made strategy implementation more challenging in jurisdictions outside of Baltimore City.

The handful of references to place that surfaced in this case study noted Bayfront’s location within a geographically isolated portion of Baltimore. Bayfront is situated on a peninsula in the southernmost portion of the city, which is largely disconnected from the metropolitan downtown area. A bridge crossing the Patapsco River serves as the primary means of connecting the Bayfront community to the remainder of the city, and represents both a geographic boundary as well as but perhaps more importantly, as a mental and metaphorical connection point from isolated Bayfront to Baltimore proper. Several interview respondents noted this geographic isolation as a major barrier for Bayfront families, but also as an opportunity the community school program’s much-

needed services. Bayfront's geographic isolation also led to a feeling, whether real or perceived, that challenges in south Baltimore were more monumental than other communities dealing with deep levels of poverty. On a very tangible level, forming partnerships at Bayfront, key tenet of the community school strategy, was much more challenging since the pool of partners willing to travel into south Baltimore was limited. This, coupled with the lack of local resources, such as grocery stores, social service agencies, and transportation infrastructure, all impacted implementation of the community school strategy at Bayfront. The school's geographic isolation also made its connection to the United Way, with its vast programmatic footprint and connections with numerous partners and service providers, all the more essential to the effective implementation of the community school strategy.

While many interview respondents did not explicitly address place, the specter of Baltimore, with all of its challenges around poverty, crime, and historic disinvestment within predominantly minority communities, was omnipresent within the research study. Kirst and Bulkley (2000) highlighted education policy implementation in urban districts, arguing that urban districts offer a distinct subset of challenges and opportunities within the realm of policy implementation and therefore deserve to be explored apart from policy implementation studies as a whole. Marion Orr explored the historical and institutional context of education policy reform in Baltimore in his book *Black Social Capital: The Politics of School Reform in Baltimore, 1986-1998*. This research provides an in-depth look into the legacy of race and class and its impact on reform initiatives instituted by the Baltimore school system.

Significance of the Study and Areas for Future Research

I believe this study on community school implementation is significant on multiple fronts. Importantly, this is one of the first studies conducted on community schools in Maryland after adoption of the new *Blueprint for Maryland's Future*. This massive policy reform, which includes community school implementation as one of the key vehicles for providing equal resources for students in need, has been touted by many as one of the largest statewide education reform efforts in history. Monitoring the successes and challenges associated with early implementation of community schools is critical as the strategy expands across Maryland. Having community school expansion associated with such a high profile reform as the *Blueprint* also has implications as the strategy expands across the United States.

The first finding addressed in the discussion section elevates the importance of people, in particular the school principal and community school coordinator. This finding builds on a theme from the policy implementation literature by elevating the critical role of additional auxiliary actors. While the school principal and community school coordinator were the most prominent players in implementing the community schools strategy at Bayfront, the Judy Center coordinator and school secretary played critical roles in helping to actualize community school planning, demonstrating how strategy implementation efficacy was attributed to multiple individuals.

The second finding, which delved into the United Way's essential role as lead agent, is a topic largely untouched in the community school literature. While not all jurisdictions employ a lead agency model in community school implementation, there is a critical mass of districts that now rely on third-party operators to contribute to strategy implementation, making this an area ripe for additional study. In the case study of Bayfront, the United Way contributed immensely to strategy implementation by hiring and managing the community school coordinator, identifying

partnerships to help meet pressing community needs, and establishing a peer network amongst United Way coordinators to assist with problem solving, group planning, and community building. The varying models for the management and support of community school coordinators warrants a future comparative study examining the different oversight structures, and benefits and drawbacks associated with community school management conducted by third-party operators or management provided directly by school districts.

The third and fourth findings elevated the siloed nature of many community schools and their often transactional relationship with the families served. While there has been little academic research on these two themes, both are common challenges experienced by many community school practitioners. The siloed construct that has developed in community schools is likely tied to school staff's need to prioritize a narrow subset of tasks, which can differ substantially for academically focused staff (e.g. teachers and special educators) and community-facing staff (e.g. school secretaries and community school coordinators). Transactional relationships between community schools and parents, on the other hand, likely result from less mature iterations of the community school model. In order to move beyond transactional relationships, school principals and community school coordinators must be intentional about creating structures to harness parent leadership, elevate parent voice, and emphasize that community schools are a two-way street, and in their best iteration, benefit from the parents' assets and talents. Without this focused attention on the importance of parents as leaders and contributors, community schools risk falling into a mode of simply being a service and resource delivery mechanism as opposed to a transformational asset for the kids and community.

With so much emphasis on people, particularly the community school coordinator, this study provides an entry point for future research into processes for selecting, supporting,

managing, and compensating community school coordinators. While other studies on community schools have elevated the importance of the coordinator and explored their roles and responsibilities in effectively facilitating the community school strategy (Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, 2016; Oakes et al., 2017), none have conducted an in-depth analysis on the managerial infrastructure needed to support implementation. Future studies examining the successful processes for recruiting and hiring community school coordinators, the skills and attributes to look for in promising candidates, recommendations for the appropriate wage in which to compensate coordinators, and an exploration of the tools needed to effectively manage, evaluate, and support coordinators, would greatly add to both the research base while also providing practical information aiding in future community school expansion.

This case study is also significant in its application of Honig's (2006) research on contemporary education policy implementation on the topic of community schools. Although the community school movement has grown in scale nationwide, this important policy lens, which examines the impact of people, policy, and places on implementation, had not been used to examine community schools before. The concept of community schools as a policy reform has many of the characteristics seen in the Honig framework, including policy designs with increasing complexity, the need to change beliefs and attitudes of ground-level implementers, and an explicit focus on people as key contributors to the reform's success or failure. The Honig (2006) framework's richness and applicability to community schools implementation provides a robust onramp for future study, particularly as the community school movement continues to grow in Maryland and across the country.

Limitations of the Study

This study of community school implementation at Bayfront Elementary has some notable limitations. While case study research enables a deep examination of an identified phenomenon, findings uncovered within a single case study site may not transfer to alternate sites. This is particularly true in fields like education, which are highly dependent on human interaction, and for policy reforms like community school implementation, where individual actors like the school principal or community school coordinator are so critical. There are also aspects of this case study that are uniquely connected to this specific moment in time. For example, critical events like the rapid expansion of community schools in Maryland spurred on by the *Blueprint* legislation and the deleterious effects of Covid pandemic, which served as a barrier to delivery of in-person community school services, impacted the origins and evolution of the community schools strategy at Bayfront.

One other major limitation of this study was the lack of student voice and perspective on community school implementation at Bayfront. While multiple adults were interviewed for the study, the bounds of the intuitional review board (IRB) approval that was sought precluded me from interviewing students and gathering their insights into the community school rollout at Bayfront. Students could have provided important perspective into many elements of community school programming, in particular the effectiveness of the integrated student supports being provided and the range of extended school time opportunities available at Bayfront. As one of the key constituents partaking in community school programming, the lack of direct student input via interviews from functions as a major study limitation.

While the findings from this case study may not have direct transferability to other sites, some of the prominent themes that are reinforced in the community school research have wide

applicability. As discussed in the findings and discussion sections, these themes include the importance of people in successful community school implementation, the need to create a welcoming environment for families, and the critical role of support entities, like the United Way, in peer sharing and partnership formation. These elements from the case study at Bayfront have universal applicability. Other key findings – particularly those around the siloed nature of community schools, which necessitates more deliberate bridging between academic and community functions, and the need to shift transactional relationships between schools and families to emphasize more parent voice and leadership – require additional study at different community school sites to determine more widespread applicability.

In general, research studies analyzing community school models have notable limitations that many scholars have cited. The limitations ascribed to community school research are also applicable to this specific case study of community school implementation at Bayfront. Casterchini and London (2012) noted that there is substantial research supporting the impact of individual programmatic elements, such as after-school programming, school-based health centers, and family engagement. Research on the additive effects of all of these programs working in unison, however, are limited. They emphasized the absence of research studies examining the wraparound strategy utilized in community schools by saying, “Without rigorous research focused on that coordinated approach, there is little information about the additive effects of programs, the importance of coordination, or the ways that they interact to improve short-term outcomes that may be linked to longer-term outcomes” (Casterchini & London, 2012, p. 16).

The lack of rigorous studies on community schools can be attributed, in part, to the inadequacy of traditional input-output research designs. Since community schools, by nature, provide multifaceted treatments in complex school, family, and community contexts, it is hard to

disaggregate what elements of the program are having an influence and the subsequent degree of the impact (Voyles, 2012). Research on community schools is also limited by the relative inability to conduct robust, randomized controlled studies. Research on interagency approaches like the community schools strategy is often cost-prohibitive and defies the direct cause and effect paradigm due to the multiple layers interacting within a complex system (Schneider, et al., 2007).

Concluding Thoughts

It has been a great privilege to conduct such an in-depth study on a topic that I am deeply passionate about. I am a strong believer in the community schools strategy, when implemented effectively, and its transformative effect on schools, particularly for those grappling with issues of concentrated poverty. Through the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future*, Maryland has made a statewide commitment to the community schools strategy, elevated its profile, and invested in its success with a multi-million dollar funding allocation. Additional studies examining the challenges and successes of community schools strategy implementation will be critical to ensuring that schools are best positioned to successfully implement the strategy.

I believe that the four major findings from this study – 1) the critical role of people in the successful implementation of the community schools strategy, 2) the importance of the United Way as a lead agent, 3) the existence of a siloed community schools structure resulting in a tangible divide between academic and community functions, and 4) a transactional community schools structure presenting a unidirectional flow of resources – provide a roadmap for elements to emphasize (as is the case with findings one and two) and elements to be mindful of (for findings three and four) when implementing the community schools strategy at Bayfront. Moreover, I feel that these findings are transferable to many sites where the community schools

strategy is being implemented. By emphasizing the importance of people, finding agencies that can support implementation, bridging communication between academic staff and community school implementers, and creating vehicles for elevating parent voice, ownership, and leadership, the overall effectiveness of implementation can be greatly enhanced and the promise of the community schools strategy can be fully actualized.

Appendix A – Welcome Email to School-Based Staff

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Joseph Manko and I am a doctoral student at the University of Maryland College Park working towards completing my dissertation on a study of community schools in Baltimore. My research is looking specifically at the challenges and opportunities associated with the implementation of the community schools strategy for newly minted community schools in Baltimore. I am hopeful that findings reported from this study will provide a greater understanding of what actions can lead to more successful implementation of the community schools model in Baltimore and across Maryland.

I was hoping to interview you because of your involvement in the community schools program at (xxx) Elementary School. The interview should take approximately 45 minutes and can be conducted during a time, date, and at a location that is preferable to you. As the interviewee, you are also free to select the format (face-to-face or virtual) that is the most convenient and comfortable. You do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable and can decide to stop the interview at any time. All interviews will be re-coded to provide anonymity to the study participants. In the study report, I will use a pseudonym to mask your comments and protect your identity. There is the potential that the interview will be audio recorded, however if you don't feel comfortable with an audio recording of the interview, or would not like to be recorded for specific sections, just let me know at any time. All study participants must be at least 18 years of age.

Please let me know if you would be willing and able to be an interview respondent for my study on community schools. I am hopeful that your insights will provide depth and perspective to the study, and will ultimately help contribute to the growing research base on community schools.

Sincerely,
Joseph Manko
Doctoral Student, University of Maryland, College Park

Appendix B – Consent Form for School-Based Staff, Parents, and Community Members



Institutional Review Board

1204 Marie Mount Hall • 7814 Regents Drive • College Park, MD 20742 • 301-405-4212 • irb@umd.edu

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Project Title	An analysis of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementation of the new community schools strategy for a case study school in Baltimore City.
Purpose of the Study	This is a research project being conducted by Joseph Manko, a doctoral student at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you are involved with, or have insights on, the community schools program at your school site.
Procedures	You are invited to participate in an interview for approximately 45 minutes to 60 minutes. This interview will be conducted during a time, date, and place that is preferable to you. As the interviewee, you are also free to select the format (face-to-face or virtual) that is the most convenient and comfortable. You do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable and can decide to stop the interview at any time. All interviews will be re-coded to provide anonymity to the study participants. I would like the opportunity to create an audio recording of the interview, however if you would prefer to not be recorded, please let me know. An example of a question that may be asked during the interview is as follows: Can you tell me a little bit about your involvement with the development of the community schools strategy at (xxx) elementary School?
Potential Risks and Discomforts	There may be some risks associated with participating in this research study. Individuals may feel some anxiety about their responses particularly if the program has not developed as it was intended. If individuals feel like their work within the community school has not been effective or there have been a large amount of hurdles or problems with program implementation, they may feel some risk in sharing their experiences. There also may be some concerns from respondents around voicing criticism about their principal, lead agency officials, district administrators, or other individuals associated with the research project. Please be assured that you are not required to respond to any

	questions that could cause discomfort and you have the authority to conclude the interview at any time.
Potential Benefits	There are no direct benefits from participating in this research. However, this study will provide an opportunity for greater understanding about the successes and challenges associated with implementation of community school models within the school district. We hope that findings reported from the study will provide a greater understanding of actions necessary to implement effective community school models.
Confidentiality	Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by assigning you a pseudonym and deleting your real name from all data. All data (field notes, audio files, interview notes, document collection) will be saved on a password protected computer and any hard copies will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the primary investigator's home office. As the research participant, you have the ability to opt in or opt out to an audio recording of your interview. All audio recordings will be kept confidential and will be viewed in their entirety only by the primary investigator. Some selected recorded clips may be used at professional educational conferences (any identifying information will be removed). If I write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if I am required to do so by law.
Right to Withdraw and Questions	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. Your decision to participate or not participate in this study will not have a positive or negative effect on your employability or relationship with your respective school. If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator: Joseph Manko 2319 Boston Street, Unit 5, Baltimore, Maryland 21224 Cell phone: (410) 206-3893; Email: manko@abell.org Or the research supervisor: Dr. Claudia Galindo

	2311 Benjamin Building, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742. Cell phone: (814)876-0683; Email: galindo@umd.edu	
Participant Rights	If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678 This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.	
Statement of Consent	Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form. If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.	
Signature and Date	NAME OF PARTICIPANT [Please Print]	
	SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT	
	DATE	
	I CONSENT TO BEING AUDIO RECORDED FOR THIS INTERVIEW	Yes/No

Appendix C – Interview Protocol for School Principals

Thank you so much for meeting with me. I would love to hear your perspectives and opinions about the implementation of the community schools program at (xxx) school. There are no right or wrong answers. All your responses will be kept confidential, pseudonyms will be used in the research paper, and study findings will be reported in aggregate. This interview should take approximately 45 to 60 minutes. You do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable and can decide to stop the conversation at any time. Do I have your permission to capture an audio recording of this interview?

Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?

1. How long have you been the principal at (xxx) school? Why did you decide to become a principal?
2. Why did you decide to become a community school? Do you feel becoming a community school has impacted the effectiveness of your school offerings? If so, in what ways? What benefits do you feel community schools can offer?
3. What is your vision for (xxx) school as a part of the community schools strategy?
4. How would you describe the rollout of the community schools strategy at (xxx) school? Who else is involved in strategy formulation and implementation? What were the roles of the various stakeholders in the implementation (teachers, parents, community members, local businesses, etc.)?
5. Since the start, how has the implementation of the community schools strategy been working? What have been the strengths of the implementation process? In retrospect, what would you have done differently as it relates to community school implementation?
6. How has implementation of the strategy evolved over the past four years? Are there aspects of the strategy that are implemented differently now than they did in year one (2019-2020)? If so, what are they and what motivated the change in approach?
7. What is your level of familiarity with the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future* (Kirwan Legislation) and the intention for how the concentrated poverty dollars should be utilized? How did this impact your implementation of the community schools strategy, if at all?
8. Is there anything about the implementation of the community schools strategy that we have discussed that you would think would be important to talk about further?

I am going to change the topic a little bit. As you may know, there are four pillars of community schools. They are: integrated student support, expanded learning time and opportunities, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership and practices. I would like to go through each of the pillars and hear more about the process for community school implementation within each specified pillar.

9. Tell me about integrated student supports being implemented at the school through the community schools strategy. What does this pillar look like for students and families at (xxx) school? What have been some of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementation of this aspect of the strategy?
10. Tell me about expanded learning time being implemented at the school through the community schools strategy. What does this pillar look like for students and families at (xxx) school? What

have been some of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementation of this aspect of the strategy?

11. Tell me about family and community engagement being implemented at the school through the community schools strategy. What does this pillar look like for students and families at (xxx) school? What have been some of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementation of this aspect of the strategy?
12. Tell me about collaborative leadership practices being implemented at the school through the community schools strategy. What does this pillar look like for students and families at (xxx) school? What have been some of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementation of this aspect of the strategy?
13. Thank you for your time. Is there any other information about implementation of the community schools strategy at your school that you feel would be helpful in adding perspective or depth to the study?

Appendix D – Interview Protocol for Community School Coordinators

Thank you so much for meeting with me. I would love to hear your perspectives and opinions about the implementation of the community schools program at (xxx) school. There are no right or wrong answers. All your responses will be kept confidential, pseudonyms will be used in the research paper, and study findings will be reported in aggregate. This interview should take approximately 45 to 60 minutes. You do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable and can decide to stop the conversation at any time. Do I have your permission to capture an audio recording of this interview?

Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?

1. How long have you been the community school coordinator at (xxx) school? Why did you decide to become a community school coordinator?
2. Can you tell me a little about the various responsibilities you have serving as a community school coordinator?
3. What is your vision for (xxx) school as a part of the community schools strategy? What benefits do you feel community schools can offer?
4. How would you describe the rollout of the community schools strategy at (xxx) school? Who else is involved in strategy formulation and implementation? What were the roles of the various stakeholders in the implementation (teachers, parents, community members, local businesses, etc.)?
5. Since the start, how has the implementation of the community schools strategy been working? What have been the strengths of the implementation process? In retrospect, what would you have done differently as it relates to community school implementation?
6. How has implementation of the strategy evolved over the past four years? Are there aspects of the strategy that are implemented differently now than they did in year one (2019-2020)? If so, what are they and what motivated the change in approach?
7. What is your level of familiarity with the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future* (Kirwan Legislation) and the intention for how the concentrated poverty dollars should be utilized? How did this impact your implementation of the community schools strategy, if at all?
8. Is there anything about the implementation of the community schools strategy that we have discussed that you would think would be important to talk about further?

Community schools, when implemented effectively, have the ability to connect students and families with resources that they would not be able to access otherwise.

9. Describe the programs and activities that now exist at the school or are in development as a result of being included in the community schools expansion.
10. Are there resources, or connections to resources, that your school is lacking that you feel would benefit your families? What are those resources?
11. Can you explain the process for connecting families to the resources that they need? Do you have any examples?
12. What have been the biggest barriers you have needed to overcome in your role as community school coordinator?

I am going to change the topic a little bit. As you may know, there are four pillars of community schools. They are: integrated student support, expanded learning time and opportunities, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership and practices. I would like to go through each of the pillars and hear more about the process for community school implementation within each specified pillar.

13. Tell me about integrated student supports being implemented at the school through the community schools strategy. What does this pillar look like for students and families at (xxx) school? What have been some of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementation of this aspect of the strategy?
14. Tell me about expanded learning time being implemented at the school through the community schools strategy. What does this pillar look like for students and families at (xxx) school? What have been some of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementation of this aspect of the strategy?
15. Tell me about family and community engagement being implemented at the school through the community schools strategy. What does this pillar look like for students and families at (xxx) school? What have been some of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementation of this aspect of the strategy?
16. Tell me about collaborative leadership practices being implemented at the school through the community schools strategy. What does this pillar look like for students and families at (xxx) school? What have been some of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementation of this aspect of the strategy?
17. Thank you for your time. Is there any other information about implementation of the community schools strategy at your school that you feel would be helpful in adding perspective or depth to the study?

Appendix E – Interview Protocol for Teachers

Thank you so much for meeting with me. I would love to hear your perspectives and opinions about the implementation of the community schools program at (xxx) school. There are no right or wrong answers. All your responses will be kept confidential, pseudonyms will be used in the research paper, and study findings will be reported in aggregate. This interview should take approximately 45 to 60 minutes. You do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable and can decide to stop the conversation at any time. Do I have your permission to capture an audio recording of this interview?

Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?

1. How long have you been a teacher at (xxx) school? Why did you decide to become a teacher? How would you describe the vision for the community schools strategy being implemented at (xxx) school? How does this fit in with the overall goals for the school?
2. How would you describe the effectiveness of the community schools strategy at (xxx) school? What measures would you use to identify the effectiveness of the community schools strategy?
3. What role did teachers play in determining the scope of services provided by the school as a part of the community schools strategy?
4. Since the start, how has the implementation of the community schools strategy been working? What have been the strengths of the implementation process? In retrospect, do you think anything should have been done differently as it relates to community school implementation?
5. How has implementation of the strategy evolved over the past four years? Are there aspects of the strategy that are implemented differently now than they did in year one (2019-2020)? If so, what are they and what motivated the change in approach?
6. What is your level of familiarity with the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future* (Kirwan Legislation) and the intention for how the concentrated poverty dollars should be utilized? How did this impact your implementation of the community schools strategy, if at all?
7. Is there anything about the implementation of the community schools strategy that we have discussed that you would think would be important to talk about?

Community schools, when implemented effectively, have the ability to connect students and families with resources that they would not be able to access otherwise.

9. Describe the programs and activities that now exist at the school or are in development as a result of being included in the community schools expansion.
10. Are there resources, or connections to resources, that your school is lacking that you feel would benefit your families? What are those resources?
11. Can you explain the process for connecting families to the resources that they need? Do you have any examples?

I am going to change the topic a little bit. As you may know, there are four pillars of community schools. They are: integrated student support, expanded learning time and opportunities, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership and practices. I would like to go through

each of the pillars and hear more about the process for community school implementation within each specified pillar.

12. Tell me about integrated student supports being implemented at the school through the community schools strategy. What does this pillar look like for students and families at (xxx) school? What have been some of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementation of this aspect of the strategy?
13. Tell me about expanded learning time being implemented at the school through the community schools strategy. What does this pillar look like for students and families at (xxx) school? What have been some of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementation of this aspect of the strategy?
14. Tell me about family and community engagement being implemented at the school through the community schools strategy. What does this pillar look like for students and families at (xxx) school? What have been some of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementation of this aspect of the strategy?
15. Tell me about collaborative leadership practices being implemented at the school through the community schools strategy. What does this pillar look like for students and families at (xxx) school? What have been some of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementation of this aspect of the strategy?
16. Thank you for your time. Is there any other information about implementation of the community schools strategy at your school that you feel would be helpful in adding perspective or depth to the study?

Appendix F – Interview Protocol for Parents

Thank you so much for meeting with me. I would love to hear your perspective and opinions about the implementation of the community schools program at (xxx) school. There are no right or wrong answers. All your responses will be kept confidential, pseudonyms will be used in the research paper, and study findings will be reported in aggregate. This interview should take approximately 45 to 60 minutes. You do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable and can decide to stop the conversation at any time. Do I have your permission to capture an audio recording of this interview?

Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?

1. How long have your children been attending (xxx) school? What are some things you like about the education your child is receiving at (xxx) school?
2. How would you describe the vision for the community schools strategy being implemented at (xxx) school? How does this fit in with the overall goals for the school?
3. How would you describe the effectiveness of the community schools strategy at (xxx) school? What measures would you use to identify the effectiveness of the community schools strategy?
4. How would you describe the rollout of the community schools strategy at (xxx) school? Who was involved in strategy formulation and implementation? How was the community involved in the discussions around community school implementation?
5. Since the start, how has the implementation of the community schools strategy been working? What have been the strengths of the implementation process? In retrospect, are there things that should have been done differently as it relates to community school implementation?
6. What role did parents and community members play in determining the scope of services provided by the school as a part of the community schools strategy?
7. How has implementation of the strategy evolved over the past four years? Are there aspects of the strategy that are implemented differently now than they did in year one (2019-2020)? If so, what are they and what motivated the change in approach?
8. What is your level of familiarity with the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future* (Kirwan Legislation) and the intention for how the concentrated poverty dollars should be utilized? How did this impact your implementation of the community schools strategy, if at all?
9. Is there anything about the implementation of the community schools strategy that we have discussed that you would think would be important to talk about further?

Community schools, when implemented effectively, have the ability to connect students and families with resources that they would not be able to access otherwise.

10. Describe the programs and activities that now exist at the school or are in development as a result of being included in the community schools expansion.
11. Are there resources, or connections to resources, that your school is lacking that you feel would benefit your families? What are those resources?

12. Can you explain the process for connecting families to the resources that they need? Do you have any examples?

I am going to change the topic a little bit. As you may know, there are four pillars of community schools. They are: integrated student support, expanded learning time and opportunities, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership and practices. I would like to go through each of the pillars and hear more about the process for community school implementation within each specified pillar.

13. Tell me about integrated student supports being implemented at the school through the community schools strategy. What does this pillar look like for students and families at (xxx) school? What have been some of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementation of this aspect of the strategy?
14. Tell me about expanded learning time being implemented at the school through the community schools strategy. What does this pillar look like for students and families at (xxx) school? What have been some of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementation of this aspect of the strategy?
15. Tell me about family and community engagement being implemented at the school through the community schools strategy. What does this pillar look like for students and families at (xxx) school? What have been some of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementation of this aspect of the strategy?
16. Tell me about collaborative leadership practices being implemented at the school through the community schools strategy. What does this pillar look like for students and families at (xxx) school? What have been some of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementation of this aspect of the strategy?
17. Thank you for your time. Is there any other information about implementation of the community schools strategy at your school that you feel would be helpful in adding perspective or depth to the study?

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